STANISLAV KONDRASHOV

THE LIFE AND DEATH of Martin Luther King

PROGRESS PUBLISHERS MOSCOW

STANISLAV KONDRASHOV

Stanislav Kondrashov is a Soviet journalist specialising in international affairs, winner of the Vorovsky prize, awarded every year for the best piece in foreign affairs journalism. He was a special correspondent of "Izvestia" in the United States. His books include "Americans in America" (1970), "The California Rendesvous" (1975) and "The Second Time Around" (1978). Kondrashov is now a political columnist in "Izvestia".

STANISLAV
KONDRASHOV

THE LIFE AND DEATH OF MARTIN LUTHER KING

PROGRESS PUBLISHERS
MOSCOW

Станислав Кондрашов

ЖИЗНЬ
И СМЕРТЬ
МАРТИНА
ЛЮТЕРА
КИНГА

На английском языке

Translated from the Russian by *Keith Hammond*

Designed by *Vyacheslav Chernetsov*

English translation of the revised and enlarged Russian text © Progress Publishers 1981

К $\frac{11105-572}{014(01)-81}$ 46-81

0804000000

CONTENTS

	Page
AUTHOR'S INTRODUCTION	7
THAT APRIL NIGHT	10
A TRIP SOUTH	39
THE BIRMINGHAM BELL	79
GHETTO UPRISINGS	146
THE FINAL ACT IN MEMPHIS	198

AUTHOR'S INTRODUCTION

This book first appeared in 1970 in Moscow. It was written on the basis of personal observations and experience, for the author had the opportunity, as New York correspondent of the Soviet newspaper *Izvestia* during the 1960s, to come to know American and the Americans. In the course of his work he naturally endeavoured to understand the serious and complex issues involved in the struggle by black Americans for human and civil rights. Inevitably, he became interested in the magnetic personality of Martin Luther King.

King was both made and broken by US society. He was assassinated at the age of only 39 years. But he had already become an historic figure and a great American by the time of his death. Despite the events that have taken place since then and the well-known inclination of Americans to live in the present, forgetting or wiping out the past, King is not forgotten. His name still resounds powerfully on the American public stage and beyond the bounds of the United States. Martin Luther King is clearly assured of a prominent, honoured and enduring place in the history of his country and the history of the 20th century's emancipation movements.

The Russian poet Alexander Blok once observed that a poet has a destiny, not a career. His

insight is unquestionably true of poets. However, it is much rarer for public figures to have destinies rather than careers. Martin Luther King was one such figure.

The personality of Martin Luther King stirred the author both as journalist and private citizen while King was still alive. His tragic death in Memphis was a violent shock and a powerful stimulus to the author to tell Soviet readers of their remarkable contemporary. This became a dictate of the author's conscience. At the same time, he realised that King's story was too large to fit the confines of a newspaper: it could only be the subject of a book. There is much that is personal in the resultant work, for as the author came to know Martin Luther King he also came, in some measure, to know himself and his time. Great men, like torches, light up the world around them.

The size of a man is shown by the cause he pursues and for which he is ready to give his life. Martin Luther King struggled against all forms of oppression and racial discrimination. He dreamed that "one day ... sons of former slaves and the sons of former slaveowners will be able to sit down together at the table of brotherhood".

Did his dream come true? Only another book, a book about the black citizens of the United States in the 1970s, could answer that question. In the author's view, the liberation movement of black Americans, after winning equal rights for the blacks, lost the driving force it had in the 1960s, leaving each person to achieve real equality as best he could beneath the discriminatory sun of private enterprise.

What, then, did Doctor King accomplish? A lot. He compelled American society to look with fresh eyes at its black fellow citizens. He aroused in black Americans a feeling of self-respect, pride and confidence in their own strength. Finally, he achieved something to which, perhaps, he never gave thought. He himself became an example for those in whose eyes, as he expressed it. "beauty is truth and truth beauty—and in whose eyes the beauty of genuine brotherhood and peace is more precious than diamonds or silver or gold".

THAT APRIL NIGHT

It was a quiet April day. There had been no major news stories and now the day was drawing to a close with no suggestion that the night might be filled with urgent reports. Sergei Losev, head of the TASS bureau in New York, and I were sitting in the *Izvestia* office, discussing the details of an extended and tiring trip. Sergei was in a hurry to go home, but I persuaded him to wait another half-hour to watch Walter Cronkite's evening news programme on CBS Television's second channel. As always, Cronkite's face with its familiar wide, bushy brows, crow's-feet and grey moustaches appeared on the screen at precisely seven o'clock. The channel's coverage of events that day in America and the world began. We listened to Cronkite and the CBS correspondents he summoned and dismissed from view like a magician. Clearly, nothing had happened that would change our plans for the evening, reminding us that a reporter's time is at the disposal of events and that he is no more than a tiny offshoot of a world-wide, high-powered network.

As Cronkite's programme drew to a close, the items, arranged in order of importance, becoming increasingly trivial and the moment for the traditional humorous footnote approaching, Sergei left the television set to make a telephone call. Suddenly, in the last moments of the half-

hour broadcast, Cronkite broke into a short, light-hearted piece of film and almost shouted, gabbling his words—the programme was almost over—that Martin Luther King had been shot and fatally wounded in Memphis, Tennessee, and taken to St. Joseph's Hospital.

I jumped up and shouted to Sergei:

"King has been fatally wounded!"

Sergei ran into the room. He was beside himself.

"Swine! The swine! . . They've killed him, the swine!"

Cronkite had fitted the news-flash into the rigid limits of his half-hour. Now, in the very last seconds, the skin around his eyes more densely wrinkled, he spread his hands over his desk and compressed his lips in a business-like way before signing off with his invariable words:

"And that's the way it is on Thursday, April 4. 1968 . . ."

Instantly Cronkite disappeared, cut off by an automatic device that saves precious air time and prevents idle seconds. Inviting, bold music broke in like a fresh spring day and harmonising with it we heard the hummed, drawn-out slogan: "Stre-e-e-tch your coffee break . . ." The screen was filled by a cup of steaming coffee, behind which a sunnily-smiling man advanced towards the screen. He promptly stripped the wrapping from a thin strip of peppermint chewing gum and inserted it with an elegant gesture into his mouth, which was kept sweet-smelling as befitted gentlemen in 1968. The cup of coffee sat down—yes, it sat down—and swelled with the inexpressible pleasure of seeing this slender strip of gum. "Stre-e-e-tch your coffee break . . ."

We rushed down to the garage and drove across a Manhattan, newly freed of the evening rush-hour traffic to the TASS office and its teletypes, which rattled out the mercilessly sober predictions of the news agencies that Martin Luther King could not live.

Sergei's telegrams flew off to Moscow, echoing these rumbling, doom-filled words, and I hurried back to my office, where I glued myself to the radio and the television set. The evening had turned upside down: there was thunder in the air.

At 8.40 pm the programme on ABC's seventh channel was faded out. The repeated word "newsflash" appeared on the screen and an announcer, speaking rapidly in order not to be overtaken by other channels, informed viewers that Martin Luther King was dead. Behind the announcer a newsroom could be seen, filled with the nervous bustle of reporters, business-like in shirtsleeves.

And once again, immediately after the newsflash, an advertisement inexorably flashed onto the screen: Hurry! Hurry! Chevrolet cars could be bought right now on especially favourable credit terms. A pretty young woman, her hair blowing in the wind, white trousers outlining her splendid curvaceousness, seated herself behind the wheel of a cut-rate Chevrolet. With her, of course, was a rugged, masculine, immaculate 1968-model male. Triumphant music accompanied them as they drove away down an avenue resembling the road to paradise while an announcer described the unusually long life of the Chevrolet's tyres, the power hidden beneath its bonnet and the remarkably easy credit terms

available to those wishing to buy it. The couple strove to convince viewers that everything in life was on easy terms. The young woman gave a dazzling smile—where are smiles like that found?—as she soared up and down on a swing, her long legs stuck out, swooping alternately into the living room—how ready she was to be embraced!—and into seventh heaven. It was from the seventh television heaven that she gazed happily at her companion and her car, gleaming with first-class chrome and paint. Beyond the swing floated a hint of the advertisement's overriding idea—what bliss awaited them in bed if a 1968 Chevrolet stood in the garage, ready at any moment to receive them with its well-sprung seats.

The tragic newsflash, followed immediately by an advertisement compounded of lust and the "good life", came like a slap in the face and I understood—or rather realised in a sickening flash—that overlaying tragedy with an advertisement, unstoppable commercialism as relentless as the movements of the planets, smirking hucksterism was triumphing over King's death, just as it had triumphed over his life and struggle. My throat filled with bitterness and pain from the thought that Americans could learn nothing for as long as this was true. There is a time to live and a time to die. But in the United States the time for selling is longest of all: whatever happens, a commercial that has been paid for must be shown and products must be lauded and sold, for everything in the world is nothing by comparison with buying and selling.

For five whole days television schooled Americans in the fact of King's death, accustoming

them to it; for five days television energetically and sometimes very movingly buried Martin Luther King. Advertising took a back-seat (later the hucksters calculated what mourning and commiseration had cost them) and disappeared altogether on the day of the funeral from 10 o'clock in the morning to 6 o'clock in the evening. But none of this erased the first impression, the feeling of despair that nothing could change for the better so long as consciousness was shattered into a thousand fragments by hard-selling commercials which, like professional executioners, quarter the integrity of a tragedy. Everything would be quickly forgotten, falling under the knife of other news and buried in the memory. Within a month or two the assassination in Memphis would be hidden behind the mountain ranges of fresh events. Had King lived? Perhaps he had never lived at all?

I recalled the evening of April 4. Reactions were soon in coming and shortly after the news of King's death television cameras at the White House showed President Lyndon Johnson. Five days before the events in Memphis he had announced that he would not seek election for a second term. The country had still to digest this news before it was thrown into the background by the murder of King. Johnson walked rapidly from his office to a rostrum bearing the presidential seal: an eagle grasping a palm branch in the claws of one leg and a bundle of menacing arrows in the claws of the other. The president expressed brief commiseration, called for the nation to remain calm and announced that, because of the assassination in Memphis, he was cancelling a trip to Hawaii, where he was to

have discussed the course of the Vietnam war with General Westmoreland and Admiral Sharp. The president was concerned and sombre; he refused to answer questions.

Journalists flew to Memphis. Television reporters did their work skilfully and excited witnesses of the assassination obediently gave their testimony in front of the cameras. The murderer was being sought: a man who had disappeared in a white Mustang. Unrest broke out, first among the black citizens of Memphis, and the governor of Tennessee immediately ordered detachments of the national guard into the city. Hastily assembled special programmes on Martin Luther King's life and struggle were already being shown and the dead man's friends and acquaintances were in demand on every channel. The shot had been fired at 6.05 pm Memphis time—7.05 pm New York time. Evening had still not become night, but already the entire world knew of the murder. Newspaper front pages were being changed to accommodate the swelling flow of news, and the teletypes chattered in news agencies. Protests were being launched and eulogies delivered. Commentators looked closely at the ghetto: King's death was a fact, but its consequences were unclear and frightening.

Martin Luther King... I had seen him at meetings, from the seats reserved for the press. I knew the quietness that filled the hall when he appeared on the rostrum—the quietness of attention and respect. We had met once for a brief moment at the University of Chicago and I had felt the pressure of his hand and seen from close quarters his calm, serious, darkly gleam-

ing eyes, his large, firm lips and his strong chin. I had heard the restrained rumble of his baritone, rising and falling with emotion like a bell, loud, reaching all yet containing vast reserves of strength. Doctor King, as always, had no time to spare and his assistant, dressed like him in the severe black coat of a Baptist pastor, reminded him of his next appointment. I requested an interview for my newspaper and King agreed. But his time, American-style, was already committed far in advance and he did not have his schedule with him: he requested me to refer to his headquarters in Atlanta. The answer I received from his secretary there informed me that Doctor King was not in Atlanta and asked me to await his return. He was constantly travelling and eternally busy. Now, alas, a meeting would not take place. I had wanted to write about the living King, but I would have to write of King dead.

During my years in the United States I had become used to King's existence, to the fact that he was alive and struggling and to the thought that I would meet him again, if not today then tomorrow. Yet one becomes used to many people and to many politicians, if only because it is a journalist's job to follow the twists and turns of their careers and to keep one's readers informed. To some one simply becomes accustomed, while others one tolerates, concealing one's dislike behind professional politeness: the latter are facts that poison life but which one is powerless to eliminate. I had not simply become used to King: I had been glad that he existed.

Truth and justice are words that have long since become easy prey for demagogues. But there

are people who possess the rare, hardly-won ability to restore to these words their original, sacred power. At first one regards such people with scepticism, critically, weighing them up in one's mind, comparing words and deeds; one is cautious and hard to please, for one has been mistaken before, and belief comes gradually and, as it were, unwillingly. But when one has checked five, ten, a hundred times one becomes convinced that here, indeed, is that rare person for whom the search for truth and justice is the essence of being and not simply the fashionable garb of the season. For me Martin Luther King was such a person. His truth and justice were immense, for they were linked to an immense problem and an immense country. His was a whole, powerful, organically developing nature at a time and in a country where the human personality was as fragmented as a week's television schedule.

King was 39 years old when he was killed: an age at which the careers of US politicians are usually just beginning to flourish, at which they present themselves to the electors in full effulgence, attracting votes and attention. King had sought not a career but justice for millions of black Americans; this black man from Atlanta was, perhaps, known in every American home. World fame, too, was not a goal in itself for him, but had come unexpectedly, as a result of the action of the Birmingham police in unleashing their ferocious German shepherd-dogs on participants in a march in May 1963. He was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in December 1964 at the age of 35, but did not rest on his Nobel laurels. For him the fate of the black

population of the southern and northern United States, who linked their hopes of a better life with his name, was most important. He aroused such hopes, knowing that it would be difficult to justify them, and worked to fulfill them to the end of his life. He was called the president of black America, but for the uneducated black sharecroppers of Alabama and South Carolina, Georgia and Mississippi he was more than a president—he was the prophet Moses, leading his people into the promised land. How variegated this super-industrialised country was, in which millions of pariahs in the second half of the 20th century still placed their only hope in God and still believed in miracles! It would be easy to mock their naiveté; more important to see beyond it to the tragedy of millions of Afro-Americans and of all America.

The life of Martin Luther King—and in particular his political life—was short, but packed with exceptional achievement: King had long been accustomed to the thought that it could be violently terminated. To tell his story is not easy, for it inevitably becomes a chronicle of the liberation movement of black Americans during the 1950s and 1960s. Martin Luther King was to some extent a mirror of this movement, of its successes and failures, hopes and disappointments, strength and weakness. He died at a time when, despite his efforts, the black movement was entering a phase of violent uprising and the counter-blows of white America were redoubling.

Martin Luther King Junior was born on January 15, 1929, in Atlanta, Georgia. His father, Martin Luther King Senior, whose friends preferred to call him Mike, was then assistant pas-

or of the Ebenezer Baptist Church at the intersection of Auburn Avenue and Jackson Street. Mike King had had his share of hardship in his youth, but by the time the second of his three children was born he had become prosperous: as a black pastor in Atlanta with a stable income of reasonable dimensions he had become a member of the privileged local black elite. This elite lived in the area of Auburn Avenue and included many of the parishioners of the Ebenezer Baptist Church, whose pastor was Adam Daniel Williams, Mike King's father-in-law.

The family's roots lay in slavery. Adam Williams, Martin's maternal grandfather, was born in 1863, of slave parents but in the same year President Lincoln proclaimed the emancipation of black slaves. In 1894 he was appointed to the Ebenezer Baptist Church and, as a man who was not only religious-minded but also possessed a practical approach, succeeded in making it one of the most respectable and financially sound negro churches in Atlanta. Adam Williams was highly respected by his parishioners and by the local black population generally. When, in 1926, his daughter Alberta married Mike King, who was then preaching in two modest churches, the fledgeling pastor received a place in the house on the hill and in the pulpit of a substantial church. He was also helped by his father-in-law's reputation.

Irish as well as negro blood flowed in the veins of Martin's paternal grandfather, forming a turbulent mixture. James King toiled in the cotton plantations near Stockbridge, some twenty miles from Atlanta, working hard and, as we know from family traditions, drinking hard from

melancholy, often brawling drunkenly in his hut and venting his grief on his wife in the manner of poor men everywhere. Once the 16-year-old Mike, who had inherited his father's temperament, almost strangled him as he sought to pacify James in riotous mood. His mother and the other children dragged Mike off his father, who threw himself in a fury at his hunting rifle. But before he could load it his son had fled. When Mike returned to his father's house in trepidation the following evening James King apologised to his son and swore never again to treat his wife badly. He kept his word.

Mike King travelled a long road to the Ebenezer Baptist Church and the house on Auburn Avenue. He worked as an assistant mechanic in a garage and as a fireman on the railway, completing his education extra-murally at night school. He understood the importance of education and spared neither effort nor money in bringing up his own children. Martin Luther King completed secondary school and graduated from Morehouse College, a higher-educational institution for male blacks in Atlanta. He was a good student. His father intended him for the church, aware that black pastors had a better chance of a secure income, the respect of the community and elementary politeness from the whites. But Martin was not immediately attracted by the church. He dreamed briefly of becoming a doctor. Later, while at college, he became interested in the art of oratory and took first or second place in student competitions for political speaking. Eventually his father, by then a prominent churchman and an active figure in the civil-rights movement, and the influence of

his theology professors triumphed in Martin's choice of career.

After graduating from Morehouse College, Martin Luther King Junior continued his education in the northern United States—at Crozer Theological Seminary near Chester, Pennsylvania, where he gained a bachelor of theology degree, and Boston University where, in 1955, he was awarded a doctorate of philosophy. In the North, where a black could enter university, Martin met another temporary fugitive from the South: Coretta Scott, a black student at the conservatory. Her father was a prosperous farmer in Alabama and she had, like King, received a good education in the North, at Antioch College in Ohio and later at Boston Conservatory. Her dream was to become a singer, but Coretta Scott and Martin Luther King Junior met, fell in love and were married in June 1953 at the Scotts' home. Martin Luther King, Sr., officiated.

Externally life was proceeding smoothly and even fortunately for this powerfully-built young man upon whom, indeed, fate had smiled. He had never known want, was always tastefully dressed, had learned excellent manners and acquired a fine education. His father did everything to advance his son. King the elder was proud of him and made the young theological scholar his assistant with the intention of preserving the Ebenezer Baptist Church a "family institution". The father encouraged his son's studies and presented him with a Chevrolet car when Martin Luther King Junior received his bachelor's degree in theology. The present demonstrates the prosperity of the ageing pastor. The King

family belonged to the black petty bourgeoisie of Atlanta. In a biography of King Junior published in 1968 William Robert Miller wrote: "As a minister's son, young Martin enjoyed a comfortable childhood. The black bourgeoisie of Auburn Avenue were little affected by the plague of unemployment that descended upon the Negro masses in the Depression years following Martin's birth—as many as 65 per cent of Atlanta's black population were eventually on the relief rolls and thousands of sharecroppers were uprooted from the surrounding countryside. For the Kings and Williamses, life was good."

Yes, life was good, if . . . If you did not think, if you hid yourself away in the warm, comfortable domestic shell and shut your eyes to the calamities suffered by the masses of black Americans, if, at the price of your personal dignity, you learned to live in the alien, hostile world of the whites, which attacked you at every step. What does a man need? Martin's father wanted to establish his son in the world, but what did that mean? The simple answer inevitably came to this: for a black, especially a black living in the southern states of the US, it meant establishing oneself among second-class people or, in the conventional expression, among second-class citizens. Even the degree of doctor of philosophy did not guarantee its holder elementary human rights, if he was a black southerner: his rights were determined by white racists. King knew that long before he defended his academic thesis.

The school of life begins at a very early age and for a black child it is a special school. Mar*tin received his first lesson at the age of five,*

when he lost the friendship of two white boys, the sons of a neighbouring grocer. The boys had been his playmates, but suddenly they began to avoid him. He would run to the grocer's house and call his friends out to play, but their parents—without open hostility, it may be noted—would reply that the boys were not home or that they were too busy to play. Thus they spared the black lad in their own way—and spared themselves, too, by shifting the burden of explanations on to his parents. Perplexed, he brought his incomprehension to his mother, in whose lap he learned for the first time about slavery, the civil war between the North and the South, the fact that he had been born black and his friends white and the immense and terrible consequences that flowed from this. What else could his mother do? What would have been the point of delaying the revelation, when the truth was already lying in wait and could break over the boy's head at any moment from the lips of pitiless strangers?

How could his mother console him? After placing upon his childish shoulders the terrible burden of the past and the present which she had borne since childhood and which crushed every American black, she told Martin: "You are just as good as anyone else." This was true and he felt it, as any child discovering the world does, but that did not change the facts of life. They made themselves felt more and more keenly.

King remembered another scene from his childhood. He had gone with his father, a large, strong, respected man, to a shoe shop. Dollars *from a black pocket are just as good as those*

from a white pocket and the salesman was ready to serve them, but they sat down by the entrance on chairs reserved for whites and the salesman asked them to go into the part of the shop set aside for "coloured" fittings.

"What's wrong with these seats?" asked King Senior, as if failing to understand. "We're perfectly comfortable here."

"I'm sorry," said the polite salesman, "but you will have to move."

"Either we buy our shoes here or we don't buy them at all," Martin's father retorted angrily.

The salesman spread his hands and father and son left. When a father is humiliated in the presence of his son both are scorched and the foundations of the child's consciousness are undermined. They walked along the street. Little Martin had never seen his father in such a fury. "I don't care how long I have to live with this system, I am never going to accept it!" swore the elder King and his son remembered his words.

Oh, the educative power of humiliation! Did the fools really fail to realise that they were sowing the wind—and would reap a whirlwind?

Once Martin's father drove through a red light. "Pull over, boy, and show me your license," the white policeman said, seeing a black at the wheel. "I'm not a boy," he retorted. "That's a boy there," pointing to Martin. "I'm Reverend King."

He demanded respect—a very bold approach in the Atlanta of the 1930s. Martin Luther King Junior's fearlessness was hereditary. The father waged single-handed the battle in which,

later. his son involved many thousands. King Senior ceased travelling by bus after witnessing a savage act of violence against black passengers.

He headed the campaign in Atlanta to gain equal pay for black schoolteachers and sought to end the segregation of elevators in the local courthouse.

Every journey into the great world outside was like a sally into enemy territory, dangerous and risky, destroying the illusion of security even at home. Yet the boy did not seek enemies: what child's heart is prepared for hostility and bitterness?

When Martin was 11 his mother once left him alone in a shop. A white woman he had never seen before came up to him and dealt him a painful slap on the cheek. "You're the little nigger that stepped on my foot!" she cried. He hadn't, but neither he nor his mother dared to reply to this humiliating slap in the face, although a black woman, had she struck a white child, could have been torn to pieces on the spot.

While a student at Morehouse College, Martin earned money during his summer holidays at a matress factory, where he discovered that the white students he worked with were paid more than blacks for the same task.

In Chester and Boston King felt freer. The blanket of segregation was less stifling and relations with white students were usually correct, if not cordial. Nevertheless, in the north, too, the eternal black wariness was required and a black had to tread cautiously in order to avoid humiliating situations.

Once King, a fellow-student and two girls (all black) were refused service at a suburban restaurant in New Jersey, where public places had been legally desegregated. When they refused to leave the proprietor appeared with a pistol, fired into the air and threatened to kill them if they would not go. They left, to return with the police. The restaurant-owner was arrested for breaking the law and two white students who had observed the incident were called as witnesses. But the students were afraid to testify and the affair was hushed up.

Thus, the young King combined university studies with the courses in life compulsory for blacks in the United States of America.

Nevertheless, King felt that blacks breathed more freely in the North and as the end of his studies approached he was tempted to remain. He was offered the pastorship of two negro churches and Coretta inclined towards the "Northern" option. But whatever the South was, it was still home, while to the fundamental attachment of birth a feeling of duty had now been added. A flight to safety in the North smacked of treachery. He chose the South and, after delivering a test sermon entitled "The Three Dimensions of a Complete Life", was appointed pastor of Dexter Avenue Baptist Church in Montgomery, Alabama. After gaining the degree of doctor of philosophy in systematic theology, King moved there with his wife in June 1955.

It would have been difficult to find a more symbolic place than Montgomery for a person struggling for equality. Alabama was rivalled in its racism only by Mississippi, and Montgomery, the Alabaman capital, was the cradle of the con-

federation of southern states, which separated from the North, the opponent of slavery, in the 1860s. On February 18, 1861, Jefferson Davis was declared President of the Confederate States of America on the steps of the State Capitol in Montgomery. Civil war followed, the bloodiest in US history, and as a symbol of the North's victory Dexter Avenue Baptist Church was built next to the racist capitol.

For almost a century they have been surveying each other, the neat little church with its 300 parishioners and the pseudo-classical, monumental capitol. The church meekly lowered its eyes, while the white dome of the capitol looked haughtily and scathingly at it—with every justification: equality between whites and blacks after the civil war did not last long and from 1875 to the 1960s not a single Alabaman black had ever sat beneath the dome of the capitol as a member of the Alabaman state legislature.

The scholarly pastor did not come to Dexter Avenue Baptist Church in order to change the balance of this symbolic confrontation. As a child of the black bourgeoisie and an intellectual priest, he was attracted by a congregation which included teachers from the local college and professional people, who gave Dexter Avenue Church, in the words of W. R. Miller, King's biographer, "a tone more intellectual and less emotional than the average". Of course, he did not think of declining the usual "social obligations" of a black pastor. But at first there was nothing about King to indicate that he would become the man who was assassinated in Memphis.

Soon, however, an event took place that changed his life.

Rosa Parks, a black seamstress at one of Montgomery's department stores, boarded a municipal bus after work on December 1, 1955. The evening rush-hour had begun and the bus was packed. The white bus-driver ordered Rosa Parks and three other black passengers to give up their seats to whites. Three, following the usual practice, obeyed. But Rosa Parks did not rise: she was exhausted by a hard day, her feet were sore from tight shoes and—to clinch the affair—she was an active member of the timid local civil-rights movement. She was dragged off the bus by force and arrested for breaching the peace.

Keeping the peace, in Montgomery as everywhere else in the South, meant that while the cents of black bus passengers were not scorned, they had to enter the bus by the front door, pay the driver and then alight again, in order not to "stink up" the bus. Then, if the bus had not moved off—and sometimes even that happened—blacks would re-enter the bus at the rear, taking empty seats there. But those seats, too, had to be given up if there were not enough places for whites—given up to any white, to any idler, even if your old legs were not strong enough to support you. All the drivers were white and the code of mutual politeness on buses did not, of course, extend to the blacks, who were shouted at and called "niggers", "black monkeys" and "black cows". In 1955 alone five women and two children (men were not counted) were arrested for disobedience and one stubborn black was shot by a driver.

Approximately 50,000 blacks lived in Montgomery: one in three of the population and 70 per cent of the municipal bus service's passengers. The arrest of Rosa Parks was the last straw. The idea of a one-day bus boycott was conceived.

The young Martin Luther King supported the idea and offered his church as a meeting-place for the organisers of the boycott. The boycott was fixed for December 5. Its organisers hoped for at least 60 per cent support from the black population, but a not very intelligent chief of police who called upon blacks to ignore the boycott and promised to back those who did, played into the organisers' hands. On December 5 each bus was followed by a police motorcycle. Even compliant blacks were unwilling to court possible danger when they saw these escorts. To the surprise of the organisers, the boycott was almost 100 per cent successful.

At 6 am King, who had slept little from excitement, was drinking coffee in his kitchen. "Come here quickly!" Coretta called to him. The bus-stop under their window was deserted. A bus went by, completely empty, although at that early hour it would usually have been filled with black maid-servants, cooks and cleaning women on their way to work for the white mistresses of Montgomery. Another bus passed—empty, quite empty. The next bus contained two—white—passengers. The front and the rear seats were all free for them. They could even have danced in this empty bus. On the same morning Rosa Parks was found guilty and fined 14 dollars. Later that day King was elected head of the boycott committee and a boycott was declared

until victory was gained, although it must be admitted that not everyone believed in it.

The election of Martin Luther King to a leading position on the committee was owed to the fact that, as a newcomer to Montgomery, he was still without opponents among either the representatives of local authorities or rival black groups. A person was needed who was acceptable to everyone—and King was that person. He received unanimous support. King, who had not sought the leadership, was surprised. Everything had happened rapidly and, for the most part, by chance. But surely there are strokes of fate which suddenly reveal unprecedented powers in people which neither they nor others had suspected—surely there are beneficial burdens which strengthen the back?

"We have been given a Moses!" said E. D. Nixon, a Montgomery black, much later. It was to Nixon that the idea of the boycott belonged. The blacks had, indeed, been given more than they had expected. But on that day they still did not know that and the surprised leader of the boycott, who had been accustomed to spend fifteen hours preparing his sermons, was obliged hastily to write his first political speech in twenty minutes in order not to be late for a meeting at an unfamiliar church on Holt Street. King arrived on time. The crowded church was in excited uproar; so were the 4,000 blacks on the street. The unusually large audience pleased and frightened him, but his voice was firm, measured and loud and his words persuasive and carefully weighed.

"There comes a time," he said, "when people get tired. We are here this evening to say to

those who have mistreated us so long that we are tired—tired of being segregated and humiliated, tired of being kicked about by the brutal feet of oppression! . ."

"We had no alternative," he continued, "but to protest. For many years, we have shown amazing patience. We have sometimes given our white brothers the feeling that we liked the way we were being treated. But we come here tonight to be saved from that patience that makes us patient with anything less than freedom and justice . . ."

The blacks of Montgomery showed that they had been saved from that patience—not for a week and not for a month. The boycott continued 381 days and entered history, for now it is considered to have marked the beginning of active struggle for equality.

The blacks were not badly organised and, in general, demonstrated solidarity. Black taxi-owners took participants in the boycott to work and back at the equivalent of bus fares. Money sent to the boycott fund was used to purchase twenty vehicles for the same purpose. But the majority were obliged to rise very early and cover on foot the long miles that separated black neighbourhoods from white in a city that was divided even physically: two-thirds of black women and half of all black men in Montgomery worked for its white masters as servants or labourers. For this reason the boycott became known as the Walk For Freedom.

The opposition of the authorities and the overwhelming majority of the white population was fierce, stubborn and multiform. The authorities exhumed a half-forgotten "anti-boycott law" of

1921 from the dust of the archives and put 90 black activists on trial, accusing them as well of organising "illegal" public transport. The licenses of black taxi-drivers carrying participants in the boycott were withdrawn. Slander, threats and open terror were used in the struggle as well as the instruments of the law. The false rumour was disseminated that King had embezzled the boycott fund, using the money to buy himself the latest Cadillac and Buick automobiles. Once he was arrested for speeding. His home telephone rang constantly with obscene and anonymous abuse. One night, when King was already in bed, his telephone rang yet again. "Listen, nigger," said an unknown voice, "we've taken all we want from you. Before next week, you'll be sorry you ever came to Montgomery."

Now King was, indeed, known in the city and with his new fame came the first respect of some and the first hatred of others. He discovered that hatred makes itself more strongly felt than love; at any rate, it uses more effective means of expressing itself. On January 30, during the second month of the boycott, racists threw a bomb at his house—the first of many. It exploded on the porch. By a miracle Coretta and King's small daughter were not hurt. King was at a meeting when he suddenly saw the alarmed face of Ralph Abernathy, his closest aide from the Montgomery boycott onward and the man destined to take his place after the Memphis shooting. "What's wrong?" King called. After a moment's hesitation, Abernathy replied: "Your house has been bombed."

King was young and inexperienced; he was

an idealist. The aim he was striving for was modest: the right to use public transport on the same terms as whites. It was also disinterested, for the young pastor owned a car and his church was close to his home. Now he found that, even to achieve equal rights on the buses, one had to be prepared to pay not only with one's own life but with the lives of those close to one. Did he have the right to take this risk? He had, after all, been elected to nothing more than the leader of the boycott committee, only to find himself the principal target of the racists, the degree of whose hatred and determination would decide the question of his continued existence. Everything was far more complex than he could have imagined; the interconnections were closer, more unexpected and more dangerous.

The bus boycott inescapably raised the question of the path King would follow. Later he was not ashamed to admit to the fear he felt at this time.

This young and inexperienced man found himself plunged into such tension, the target of slander and constant serious threats night and day, that within six weeks of the beginning of the boycott he was on the brink of nervous exhaustion and collapse. After the threatening telephone call he was unable to sleep all night. "I am afraid," he reflected during the quiet hours by the silent telephone. "The people are looking to me for leadership, and if I stand before them without strength and courage, they too will falter. I am at the end of my powers. I have nothing left." Later he recalled the difficult but firm conviction that was born in him that night. "Stand up for righteousness, stand

up for truth, and God will be at your side forever . . ."

Fear was a prelude to fearlessness, hastening King's choice. He burnt his bridges. Retreat would be equivalent to the suicide of a person and the perpetuation of the slave. By the time the first bomb was thrown on to his porch, King's doubts were behind him. W. A. ("Tacky") Gayle, the mayor of Montgomery, who came to the scene of the crime with the police, was surrounded by a large crowd of furious blacks ready to lynch him for his unambiguous indulgence of the racists. Rushing home, King saw that an eruption was imminent. He mounted his ruined veranda and persuaded the rebellious blacks to disperse. "Don't get panicky . . . We are not advocating violence . . . We must love our white brothers no matter what they do to us . . . If I am stopped, this movement will not stop. What we are doing is just . . ."

The crowd broke up.

Later bombs were thrown at other targets—at Abernathy's home, at negro churches and at a taxi stand. The Ku Klux Klan mobilised in Montgomery and throughout Alabama. On February 10, 1956, a large racist meeting was held in the State Coliseum, the speakers at which included Mississippi Senator James Eastland, an arch-segregationist. A leaflet distributed at the meeting read in part: "We hold these truths to be self-evident that all whites are created equal with certain rights, among these are life, liberty and the pursuit of dead niggers . . . My friends, it is time we wised up to these black devils. I tell you they are a group of two-legged agitators who persists in walking up and down

our streets, protruding their black lips. If we don't stop helping those African flesh-eaters, we will soon wake up and find Reverend King in the White House."

But the blacks of Montgomery were victorious. By a US Supreme Court decision of December 21, 1956, they were given the right to sit where they wished in buses without the obligation to leap to their feet whenever a white wanted to sit down.

The racists of the southern states had experienced King's stubbornness for the first time. For the young pastor a new life had begun: that of a struggler. He learned to do without sufficient sleep and to see his family only at irregular intervals. He had become a national figure and travelled widely within the United States, delivering political speeches, collecting desperately needed money and striving to achieve solidarity and gain sympathy. His was the honourable and dangerous right of standing in the front rank of the freedom marches—a prominent and tempting target.

Since the boycott King had understood the power of large organised groups. Gradually he elaborated the tactics of non-violent, mass "direct action", adapting to the realities of the southern states the methods of Mahatma Gandhi, who had used the weapon of civil disobedience in the struggle against the British. Like Gandhi, King was inspired by the ideas of the great 19th-century American poet and philosopher Henry Thoreau, who defended the right of citizens to resist unjust laws and acts by the government in his work *Civil Disobedience.*

Why non-violence? King explained on more

than one occasion why he had chosen this method. In an article for the magazine *Look* which appeared after his murder, he expounded his ideas for the last time. "Non-violence was a creative doctrine in the South because it checkmated the rabid segregationists who were thirsting for an opportunity to physically crush negroes. Non-violent direct action enabled the negro to take to the streets in active protest, but it muzzled the guns of the oppressor because even he could not shoot down in daylight unarmed men, women and children. This is the reason there was less loss of life in ten years of Southern protest than in ten days of Northern riots."

Non-violence, according to King, did not mean non-resistance to evil. "To cooperate passively with an unjust system makes the oppressed as evil as the oppressor," he stressed.

At the same time that Montgomery's black strugglers found a new leader, the role of chief spokesman for the interests of all Afro-Americans in the country was being claimed by the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP). Established in 1910, the senior black organisation was headed by members of the moderate black bourgeoisie and received support from white liberals and condescending attention from the federal authorities. The NAACP was closely linked to the Democratic Party and supported its candidates at elections. The association sought to bring about the abolition of segregation through the courts by obtaining legal decisions proclaiming that segregation was unconstitutional. The 1954 US Supreme Court decision on public school desegregation, reached after prolonged examination, was

owed to the initiative of the NAACP. This decision was hailed as an historic landmark, but it was soon discovered that the effect of the decision was psychological rather than practical. In 1964, ten years after the decision, only one per cent of black children in the southern states attended desegregated schools; in Mississippi not a single school had been desegregated. The realities of the system that had entrenched racism possessed supreme "constitutionality".

The NAACP was accused of the bankrupt doctrine of "tokenism": that is, of seeking symbolic gains which essentially altered nothing and could give blacks only the illusion of change.

By the mid-1950s the civil-rights movement (if the actions of disparate groups can indeed be called a movement) was faced by an unmistakeable crisis: progress was not taking place in civil rights, yet waiting had become intolerable. Civil rights had to be taken, not begged, and in order to take them the masses had to be mobilised.

The crisis of faith in the possibility of achieving advances through constitutional means brought into being a number of extreme currents. The most popular was represented by the Black Muslims, who were surrounded by a veil of secrecy. Elijah Muhammad, their "prophet", whose headquarters were in Chicago, converted his adherents to the Moslem faith and preached "black superiority"—that is, racism in reverse—declaring all whites to be "devils". He saw no point in integration with "devils" and proposed the fantastic idea of establishing an independent black republic within the frontiers of the United States; he also talked of a terror campa 'n against "white America".

King rejected both the doctrine of the Black Muslims and the doctrine of "tokenism". Later he wrote of the early years of his struggle: "Some called for a colossal blood bath to cleanse the nation's ills. To support their advocacy of violence and its incitement, they pointed to an historical tradition reaching back from the American Civil War to Spartacus in Rome. But the Negro in the South in 1955, assessing the power of the forces arrayed against him, could not perceive the slightest prospect of victory in this approach. He was unarmed, unorganised, untrained, disunited and, most important, psychologically and morally unprepared for the deliberate spilling of blood. Although his desperation had prepared him with the courage to die for freedom if necessary, he was not willing to commit himself to racial suicide with no prospect of victory."

King saw his path as lying in mobilisation of the masses. He realised that segregation would not be overturned by court decisions; instead, he assaulted it with mass marches, boycotts and sit-ins. He chose the course of open, direct—but non-violent—confrontation with the racists, consciously creating crises and tension in the racist South. He called tension "creative" because the blacks, by dramatically demonstrating their demands and their determination, could create a new climate in inter-racial relations. Crises were a means of moving towards negotiations aimed at abolishing the unjust laws and practices of segregation, negotiations reinforced by the actions of the masses. He emphasised "direct action" and chose a field of confrontation with racism that could be seen by the entire country

and by the world—the streets and squares of US towns and cities.

A journey always begins with the first step. When Martin Luther King took the first step of his journey in Montgomery he did not know how long it would be.

Rosa Parks and the 50,000 other black citizens of Montgomery could now occupy the front seats in buses, although hostile stares still obliged them to squeeze into their old seats at the back and from time to time integrated buses were fired on in the evenings. But "Whites Only" notices continued to hang at the entrances to restaurants, cafes, motels and parks.

When I first visited the South in December 1961, five years after the famous boycott, I saw a notice in the Elite Cafe in Montgomery announcing that the owners reserved the right to refuse to serve any customer it chose. "Any customer" meant any black.

During this trip I made the indirect acquaintance of Martin Luther King. I also became directly acquainted with the customs of the American South. I should now like to describe this region in a little more detail. The reader will find no accounts of Lynch law in my story: even American journalists are not invited to these exercises of "justice". There is nothing alluringly terrible in these pages—just a brief excursion into the psychology of Southerners.

A TRIP SOUTH

At that time I was still a complete novice in America, having spent no more than six months in New York. The city had overwhelmed me

with its frenetic pace and the variety and, as it seemed to me, excessive weight of its houses, people, cars and consumer goods. With a feeling of impotence I recognised that this city was impossible to sum up; there was no single word for New York. During the rainy autumn days, when the rustle of cars over the asphalt had a sharper and sadder note and the mushrooms of large black umbrellas opened over passers-by, these impressions strengthened.

The essence of New York was hard to sense: it seemed to have become submerged in the self-sufficient rhythm of the city, in the paradox of an enormous mass of people who had crowded together here only in order to have a keener sense of their own separateness. New York resembled Cairo, my previous posting, in one respect: the crowds were sprinkled with dark-skinned people. In Cairo they had been mainly Sudanese; here they were American blacks.

I was then living at the corner of 87th Street and Park Avenue. The edge of Harlem was not far away, beginning in the Hundreds. Harlem was next door, but it lived separately and at first I was struck by the merciless self-criticism of Americans, who called it by the sinister and hopeless name "ghetto". There were no walls around Harlem, no barbed wire, no SS men with guard dogs. Physically it merged with the rest of Manhattan, but people nevertheless usually talked of it as a ghetto.

During those rainy days I would plunge into the dreary, wet maw of the underground on the corner of 86th Street and Lexington Avenue on my way downtown. The carriages were jammed with the inhabitants of Harlem, who had board-

ed the train in the Hundreds. In this dirty New York underworld I would covertly glance at the people, withdrawn into themselves and already hypnotised by the frenzied clatter of the wheels. The train was carrying us headlong beneath buildings countless stories high, the tallest buildings in the world. Those minutes were filled with a kind of incommunicable revelation. As a stranger in town, a newcomer to a city that yields itself with such difficulty, I felt an emotional kinship with these people: they were obviously strangers here, too. It was as if they were revealing their secret about New York, that unspoken secret that was best suited to the underground. Of course, I knew about the inhabitants of Harlem, but that was learned knowledge, gained from newspapers and books. How important one's first experience is—small, perhaps, but one's own—when one is still floundering in an alien environment. But I also felt something else: an absence of mutuality, a psychological barrier that had formed between us. For them I was a white—nothing more.

At first I saw them as a mass, without heroes or individuals. Of course, heroes and individuals existed, but do we always know about them, looking at the United States from afar?

How many heroes and martyrs of black America were there—those men and women whose names blazed, comet-like, in newspaper reports of "racist crimes", to be blotted out the following day in the memories of readers?

One such hero was Malcolm X. Malcolm chose this bizarre surname, rejecting his family name of Little, because the latter was not his own: when nameless black slaves were brought to

America they were "marked" with the names of their owners. Malcolm called himself X and, indeed, the real value of this rapidly growing unknown quantity remained undiscovered, for when only 40 Malcolm was killed at a Harlem meeting. Having begun life without the advantages of King—Malcolm had been an habitual criminal—this man of rare natural gifts flung himself into the Black Muslims movement, rapidly becoming the right-hand man of its mysterious and jealous "prophet" Elijah Muhammad. When Malcolm realised that the path of the Black Muslims led only into another dead-end, he broke with the "prophet". He matured with lightning speed into a highly popular leader of black youth in the northern ghettoes, his frequent changes of course reflecting his growing depth and breadth. Rejecting the spiritual self-isolation of the Black Muslims, he built bridges from oppressed blacks to oppressed whites, moving towards an awareness of the Afro-American movement as a part of the world revolutionary process. Many saw in him a potentially great revolutionary, who combined passion, dedication and a cool head. The more forcefully he lashed the vices of America, the more harshly and mercilessly the major newspapers pursued him. In February 1965 he was killed by a Black Muslim fanatic in broad daylight at a mass meeting. "Big Malcolm" is remembered in the black ghettoes, but for white America his name is quite forgotten: posthumous sensations supposedly involving the dead leader would be difficult and, indeed, pointless to manufacture.

During my first days in New York as a correspondent I naturally understood that black

affairs would be among the topics I should have to cover. News about blacks was "interesting"—oh, inappropriate word!—and reporting on black affairs therefore became a regular part of my duties. A caustic anecdote was already being told concerning a short but pungent exchange between an American and a Soviet citizen. "What is the average income of an engineer in your country?" asks the American. Realising the underhand and provocative character of this question, the Russian gives the devastating response: "In your country negroes are lynched."

An anecdote is only an anecdote, but this one expressed an extreme argument: "In your country negroes are lynched." Such arguments are vulnerable: one extreme can easily be refuted by another. A friend of mine, recently arrived in America, told me at that time: "We write that this is bad and that is bad about black life. But I've seen blacks who drive Cadillacs . . ."

What, then, was the position of blacks? Were they being lynched or were they driving Cadillacs? The truth was that facile generalisations, filled with false wisdom, were emerging in reaction to cliches which turned genuine pain and complexity into self-nullifying truisms.

The penetrating notes Ilya Ehrenburg wrote on his 1946 visit to the United States contain an interesting aspect. Ehrenburg was travelling with two other Soviet writers, all of whom were shown New York before being invited to see any other part of the United States they wished. Ehrenburg chose the South, conjecturing that it was there he might find the touchstone of America, there the problems of justice, the American character and the future of this immense, self-

satisfied, self-critical, turbulent country would be solved.

I appreciated the accuracy of his choice when, at the end of December 1961, I travelled to the South with Vladimir Bogachev, a TASS correspondent and long-time resident of the United States, to make a Christmas report on the position of black Americans.

...The Washington train was approaching Chattanooga, a city on the border of Tennessee and Georgia. A chilly, overcast dawn was breaking. The black attendant roused us at 7 am and we stepped out, shivering, on to the rear platform of our carriage, which was the last. The platform was open and the rails snaked coldly away beneath the wheels. The white conductor, who had boarded the train shortly before, asked our attendant about the weather in Washington. He looked at the rails, not the black man. The latter answered courteously and monosyllabically: "Yes, sir, no, sir...."

He belonged to the old school of black railway attendants trade union. The previous evening he had played the role of a cheeky fellow, half servant, half jester, aware that the gentlemen were not averse to banter providing that the banterer kept his distance. This was not his true nature: he *played* this rather old-fashioned role, knowing it to be the image of the black the whites with whom he came into contact wanted. He was like a tap-dancer, made up to look like a black, the colour too deep on his face and his lips too thick and white.

This morning, however, having brushed us down in the corridor of the carriage, he stood sombre and polite before the conductor. His

manner had been changed not by the sobering greyness of the dawn, but by the fact that our train was now running through the South.

In the early pre-Christmas morning the square in front of the railway station was dreary and deserted, if one did not count the half-dozen drunks sleeping off their hang-overs. But the Hertz office in the station was full of life and the girl on duty merely checked our driving licenses and filled in a form before presenting us with the key of a brand-new, cherry-red Chevrolet. Not a cent changed hands. As the temporary owners of the Chevrolet, we had been granted freedom of action in this unfamiliar city and we drove through its empty streets looking for a motel at which we could stay. There were 97 hotels and motels in Chattanooga and its environs at that time with a total of 3,563 beds.

This was my first encounter with the provincial United States and the ease with which we had rented a car directly at the railway station was only the first of a series of marvels.

At the Drake Motel we found a spotless, comfortable room with a television set, a gleaming bath and a nickel-plated shower fixture which could be set to deliver a gentle stream or a raging torrent, at least a dozen towels for the two of us, hygienically sealed glasses, tablets of scented soap, etc., etc.

I picked up the telephone and asked for New York long distance: the call was put through immediately. Was this the provinces? The backward South?

Chattanooga teased us with the abundance of its mechanised, service-oriented civilisation.

Of the Indians who once lived here nothing remained but the strangely beautiful name of the city. Everything else was the product of the 20th-century America. The local guidebook gave figures that seemed improbable, although it was impossible to doubt them. The 250,000 inhabitants of the "commercial area" of Chattanooga (the population of the city proper was 120,000) owned 87,000 cars and had at their disposal 106,000 telephones. Their bank deposits totalled $3,942 million and they were served by nine television stations, nine airlines offering 32 flights a day and nine bus companies offering 230 departures a day. Five hundred industrial enterprises manufactured 1,500 products, while 6 million broiler chickens were processed every week.

This was part of the provinces—but of the American provinces.

The Hertz Chevrolet, the ultra-modern Drake Motel and the stream of cars and broiler chickens imposed their own conditions, thrusting themselves as an unexpected and apparently unnecessary element into the plans of two journalists who had come for material about the savage, racist South. We had been brought up to respect statistics and to believe that facts were stubborn, unambiguous things. Yet the six million broiler chickens processed every week in Chattanooga were somehow compatible with the closure of 100 of the 200 coal mines that had been in existence ten years previously and the joblessness of 60 per cent of the mine workforce.

Fred Hickson, political observer of the *Chattanooga Daily Times,* deluged us with such statistics. We noted them down with some perplexity, but nevertheless kept our main goal in mind and sought to penetrate through the broiler chickens to black Chattanoogans, who constituted 39 per cent of the city's population.

Fred Hickson had an intelligent gaze and the instinct of a man who had worked for 32 years in newspapers. Perceiving the direction our thoughts were following, he became philosophical. There was no racial problem in Chattanooga, he told us, although segregation did exist. That was quite natural, was it not? After all, in the Soviet Union, too, people did not invite everyone home. Why should Americans be obliged to fraternise with blacks?

Then Fred Hickson addressed himself to a broader theme. Human nature, he told us didactically, was the same everywhere. Human emotions were always the same, in Chattanooga, Moscow, Leningrad or New York.

His racism had a philosophical underpinning —universal morality—and he believed it possible to build a tower using this material from which the entire world could easily be surveyed, everything explained to everyone and Chattanooga coupled with Leningrad. He wanted to co-opt us as fellow-participants, who could not but subscribe to the natural laws of the human community. However, his explanation was still incomplete.

No country had the right to enslave people, Fred Hickson continued. The blacks had made an outstanding contribution to the progress of the United States. They might have laid the

floor we were standing on (Hickson drew his shoe over the floor). Or they might have made this table (and he drummed his fingers on it).

Was he, then, a racist? Following a habit going back to childhood, one wanted a definite yes or no, but Fred Hickson did not fit into any of the usual categories as he showed now one side, now another of himself.

Oh, the sublime innocence and impatience of the simpleton, hurrying to discover America and every American in it!

Our new acquaintance had turned to history and was describing the 1836 agreement swindling the Chattanooga Indians. His role was now that of prosecutor, directly exposing his country's past.

People were not very proud of the agreement, he told us. Those had been barbarous times.

His words formed an instant quotation, but Fred Hickson had already returned to the black inhabitants of present-day Chattanooga. He ran his eye over the people sitting behind desks in the large "information room" but failed to find the man he was looking for as he told us that there was on the staff of the *Chattanooga Daily Times*—one black. His job was to write about black affairs.

One black ... We could have asked why there was only one, when two out of every five of the city's inhabitants were black. But we did not go into the arithmetic of the matter or accuse Mr Hickson of "tokenism". At that time I did not know this word or the logic behind it: that if a hundred blacks own Cadillacs a million blacks are happy and that if one black reporter works on a newspaper its publisher can

sleep peacefully, for he has redeemed the sin of segregation.

"But why does he write about black affairs, Mr Hickson?"

Mr Hickson was amazed by this absurd question.

"It's natural," he said, shielding himself with his favourite word. After all, who knew the affairs of blacks better than a black? If the paper employed a Russian, he would write about Russian affairs.

"Yes, but this man isn't simply a black—he's a black American."

Yes, he was an American, but he was, above all, a negro and Mr Hickson had involuntarily betrayed himself by speaking of the black reporter as a negro rather than as an American. Yet had he really betrayed himself? He had not sought to conceal anything, but had answered directly. The way he thought was in his blood: there were simply Americans and there were American blacks. In the blood, that is to say, of a liberal Southerner working on a liberal newspaper, who would have been indignant had he been called a racist—after all, he knew better than you who racists were!

Christmas eve came early and rapidly in Chattanooga. After dinner in the restaurant of the Drake Motel, where the bourgeois citizens of Chattanooga, all unimpeachably white, sat soberly, quietly and dully, Bogachev and I drove off in our Chevrolet in search of the other, black Chattanooga.

There was not a soul to be seen in the main shopping district, on Broad and Market Streets. Garlands of multi-coloured lamps shone with a

cold beauty and we could see white American five-pointed stars and red Christmas bells. In the illuminated windows of closed shops goods lay in abundance, providing confirmation of the statistics Mr Hickson had given us. The broad expanses of shopping centres and supermarkets had been removed to the cheaper land of the suburbs. Here and there along the main road, under awnings or exposed to the air, hundreds of cars were displayed for sale. They looked orphaned, since there was no one on the pavement to admire them, and although second-hand, they still gleamed seductively in the lights.

In the cold neon of the streets, unusually deserted on this pre-Christmas evening as if cleared of crowds in order not to distract the attention of two unexpected guests, Chattanooga gave us a vivid demonstration of the prosperity of provincial America. Of course, it lacks the material refinement and even superfluity of New York, but in terms of goods provincial America has long since eliminated differences between itself and the big cities.

And then we drove into another Chattanooga.

On East 8th Street we saw poor wooden houses with small porches. In every hut, in the little windows at the back of the porches, we could see small green wreaths behind red lamps and electric candles, glorifying Christ. They winked sadly and meekly, casting a pale light on to the dark street. For some reason it seemed to me that these were just like the secret lamps of the persecuted early Christians.

There were no signs, but it was clear that we had entered black Chattanooga.

We stopped and got out to walk. The Christ-

mas lamps gleamed unpretentiously, carrying with them a shy hope. Passers-by were few. Human figures came out of the darkness, black faces merging with dark clothes. For them our white faces were like warning signs: careful, strangers! We could feel that white people did not come here, especially in the evening, when darkness physically reinforced the isolation of the two races. We were the only whites in this black Chattanooga—not counting Clark Gable, whose face shone white from posters. He had recently died and posthumous exploitation of his fame was at its peak.

The lights of the poor houses and the black faces emerging from the darkness stood in silent contrast to the diners at the Drake Motel and the Olympian thoughts of Fred Hickson on the naturalness of all this. We felt the misfortune, the submissiveness, the hopelessness, emanating from them, something which had existed since the beginning of time but which nevertheless could not become natural.

Could unhappiness, suffering and humiliation ever be accepted as natural?

I remember the anxiety flowing through the lilac shadows and the gleaming Christmas lamps. It grew out of our isolation on those ghetto streets, out of the sudden awareness that we were doing something inadmissable, that we were overstepping the line set by an unwritten yet powerful law. To this was added a feeling of watchfulness and a desire for an extra, far from redundant, pair of eyes in the back of one's neck.

I cannot forget that anxiety, for it was repeated many times in the evening and even in day-

light on the streets of the dozens of black ghettoes I later saw in innumerable cities.

That pre-Christmas evening in Chattanooga taught a novice in the United States the art of feeling. People with dark faces hurried past and I understood that it would be impossible to talk to them, even impudent, because, for them, we were whites—full stop. The understandable caution aroused by an encounter with a stranger would be compounded by the barriers of a race which had long since learned to cover up in face of another race rather than to make inquiries. We were not regarded as strangers, who might be pleasant or unpleasant: instead, we were looked on as representatives of an alien, hostile, dangerous species. Individual confirmation was certainly not needed—that had been obtained long ago and you, a white man who had somehow entered Chattanooga's black ghetto, bore responsibility and personal guilt for everything that had been done over centuries by white people from other countries than yours and with quite different opinions, but who had perfidiously compromised you by having the same colour of skin. These black people hurrying past seemed to warn us that our attempts to come to know the South would never be completely successful, because the spirit of the black American was closed to whites and without knowing this spirit how could one know the South?

Three hundred years of history, beginning in 1619 when the first shipload of African slaves arrived in the American South, was presenting its bill on December 24, 1961, and in some way it was up to you, the white man, to pay it, conscious of the distrust and the incomprehension

and the inquiry in the eyes of the Chattanooga blacks you encountered on the street. Like Fred Hickson, they, too, saw everything in terms of this accursed, stale division into blacks and whites, Americans and Afro-Americans, and I shall scarcely be in error if I say that, even during a fleeting meeting on the street, in a bar, in an office or at a cinema, almost every black American reacts to a white American, a white *stranger,* with an unconscious flash of distrust. The converse is also true. This field of racial tension, which is usually hidden, is so strong in the United States that even a foreigner cannot but feel it. It links as well as divides white and black Americans; it is constantly present in the two races' consciousness of each other and draws them towards each other, for black America wants to know white America and vice versa. The danger signals are mutual.

Of course, not all white Americans and not all black Americans are the same, but as a general rule they are divided and cannot fully understand one another. Nevertheless, they want to understand each other and resort to fantastic enterprises in their attempts to achieve comprehension. For example, a journalist called John Howard Griffin obtained a special dye that gave him the appearance of a black and travelled in this guise through the South, experiencing some, although certainly not all, of the everyday torments of the black hell and often cursing himself for undertaking what proved to be an appallingly dangerous experiment. More than once Griffin felt that his life hung from a hair. He experienced the animal fear of racists that is unknown to whites and became infected with

the hatred felt by blacks for "mister Charlie", as blacks call whites in the South. *Black Like Me,* his honest account of his life as a black, was a sensation at the beginning of the 1960s.

We had not supplied ourselves with the special dye used by Griffin and we were, in any case, on public view: our route had been approved by the State Department, where we went and how long we spent there had been agreed upon in advance and as soon as Christmas was over we found that our every step was dogged by three FBI agents, who were impossible to "lose". Two green Fords followed us, their tall aerials betraying their special character. My companion nicknamed one of the agents, a grey-haired man with the noble profile of a de Sica hero, the count. The other two agents were nondescript in appearance. The count was evidently the senior man and travelled alone. When we stopped for a snack, they would park their cars by ours and enter the same cafe, innocently averting their eyes but choosing a table that gave them a good view of us. When we stopped for a night at a motel they would sleep in the next room; next morning they would talk loudly, walk about noisily and test the engines of their cars, letting us know that the working day had begun and it was time to move on and taste the sweet sensation of speed.

We adhered strictly to our route, but once we missed our turning at night and stopped on a dark, empty highroad. One pair of headlights came to a halt behind us, while the other pair swept past to stop some way ahead of us. After completing this pincer movement the FBI men waited, prepared for anything, to see what would

happen. But all we did was turn round; the two Fords also turned and the machine in front of us led us to the right road.

"Don't worry, chaps," Bogachev remarked. "We won't go anywhere without you."

When we left our car on arrival in a new town they were forced, willy-nilly, to become "pavement-pounders". This they did not like.

"Sorry, chaps, but it can't be helped. You'll have to walk. After all, we have work to do, too."

We became used to them and wondered what they would write about us in their reports after our trip and what they would say when they spoke about "tailing the reds" at conferences of their colleagues.

It would have been impossible and risky to "lose" them. FBI agents can always find an opportunity to punish the disobedient and even a minor matter like a nail pushed into a front tyre could have been the cause of unpleasantness. But in general their work interfered with ours, increasing what was already a high barrier of suspicion. What black American, especially in Georgia or Alabama, would speak frankly with whites on the street—strangers, foreigners, their motives unknown—if two green Fords stopped a few yards from their car, Fords with tall aerials, whose purpose and passengers were clear.

In short, we were taught the elements of the South by moderate, respectable white Southerners, who are renowned for their gentlemanly manners and hospitality.

There was something pastoral in the quiet red hills of Georgia, the concrete roads that ran through the December forests and the cardboard

Christmas stars and bells in the streets of the cosy towns, which hid their quiescent ghettoes in out-of-the-way corners. Our rented Chevrolet carried us smoothly and effortlessly onwards and the informal yet concerned voices of the announcers coming over the car radio reminded drivers that there were other Christmases to come and that we should drive carefully, for death, alas, never took a day off. I tasted the peaceful idyll of Christmas carols for the first time and also learned from often-repeated commercials of the virtues of Dash, a brand of canned dog food that kept American dogs the right weight—not too fat, not too thin—while preserving their vigour. Dash, I was told, made a splendid Christmas present for man's four-footed friend!

Oh, the charms of the Drake Motel, the first American motel to harbour your humble servant! The first, but not the last southern motel where I was made party to a conspiracy against America's dark-skinned citizens. There was not even a "Whites only" notice, but blacks were refused admission: the rules of private property were a safeguard of racism. A foreigner, even a "red", enjoyed all the rights denied black Americans. You were on the other side—the better, the comfortable side—of the racial barrier and because you were there, you found it hard to meet the eye of your black maid when she came to clean out your motel room. Yet what could you do? Sleep on the street? You would certainly be met with bewilderment in a motel for blacks.

In Rome, Georgia, a small town of 32,000 people, Christmas had left the central square utterly deserted. There we found a monument depicting Romulus and Remus being suckled by a

wolf. The monument, which bore the words "Roma Novae—Roma Aeterna", was presented to the town by Benito Mussolini in 1929. Later, American blood was to flow in Italy and the Duce, to the joy of Americans, was hung by his heels, but Rome, Georgia, kept its gift from the executed dictator. Like its renowned sister city it stands on seven hills, a fact to which it no doubt owes its name. We did not count the hills, but another, supplementary hill had evidently been found for black Romans—they lived like outcasts.

In the restaurant of the Central Forrest Hotel the glum boredom of an American Christmas lunch reigned. Even the waiters were white: blacks were confined to bringing clean plates and removing dirty ones. Blackness was present in the hotel rooms in two forms: on the covers of the inevitable bibles and in the faces of the cleaning women. A young white woman called Joanne was on duty at the desk. Her husband was a bus driver, her father worked for the gas company and her mother was employed in a textile factory. This southern family occupied a humble position in society, yet Joanne's 18-month-old daughter was looked after by a "coloured" woman.

At the Chamber of Commerce, to which we hurried next morning when the holiday ended and citizens returned to normal life under the motto "business as usual", we met Mr Collins, the chamber's head. After overcoming his initial confusion, Mr Collins told us that 820 of Rome's businessmen belonged to the chamber. However, not one of them was black. His explanation for this was disarming: there were simply no blacks who could have their own business.

A General Electric Co. plant is located near Rome. Its workforce—engineers, technicians and assembly-line workers—numbers one thousand, but includes only a handful of blacks. If wages are high, the management can attract and give preference to white workers.

La Grange lies 94 miles to the south of Rome. The further south one travels, the more indisputable segregation becomes and in La Grange, population 26,000, blacks were separated from whites in schools, hospitals, at the bus station and in the service sphere. Only shops were available to blacks and whites on an equal basis.

We were standing by the doors of the bus station when a Greyhound express drew up—a comfortable giant on whose silver sides a greyhound was depicted. Whites emerged first, followed by blacks, who had travelled at the back. An elderly black woman climbed down from the bus and walked towards the main entrance of the station. Glancing inside, she stepped back—that was the section for whites. She had found her bearings now—and the door intended for her, which bore the sign "Coloureds Only". The section for whites was three or four times larger than that for blacks and was cleaner, more comfortable and brighter, with an imposing entrance. Three soldiers and an officer sat in the black section: US citizens on military service. The state had enlisted them in the army and entrusted them with the defence of its interests, but it could not protect their dignity in the bus station at La Grange.

It is one thing to hear or read about such things—another to see them. They are so un-

natural that it would seem easy to eliminate them. But when, curious, you glance in to the dreary section for "coloureds" and catch, not with your nostrils but with your eyes and nerves, the smell of humiliation, rejection and impotent submissiveness permeating the atmosphere of this room in which you are met by the uncomprehending, anxious gaze of blacks and feel the barbed, assessing look of a white in your back, you become queasy.

You want to be simply a person, but you are forced to be a white person, lucky for life that you were born of white parents and very lucky that you were born in a country where there are no blacks and, therefore, there was no possibility of your being black. You want to stand between these two doors, between these two notices, and loudly proclaim in English, unembarrassed by the shortcomings you could not eliminate in the language laboratory back in Moscow, the banal truth that all people are born equal. That truth was first stated officially in America—in the Declaration of Independence—and it is also enshrined between the hard black covers of the bibles which you can read to your heart's content before falling asleep in the motels of Georgia or listen to at length in Christmas television broadcasts. But there was no equality and fraternity in La Grange, where Christians were even separated after death in the town's segregated cemeteries. Perhaps white Southerners dream of segregated gates to paradise as they enter the grave?

Southerners have their own views of what is natural and what is unnatural. From their point of view, segregation is natural and therefore does

not present a problem. Problems only arise when black Americans act against segregation. In Rome we were told that relations between whites and "coloureds" were normal. Why? Because "coloureds" constitute only 15 per cent of the population and prefer to keep quiet. Mr Crowe, the editor of the local newspaper in La Grange, explained that one had to deal with segregation issues seriously only when "freedom riders" appeared in town. ("Freedom riders" were then struggling against segregation on buses.) Mr Crowe, moreover, considered himself more liberal than the "typical Southerner". Southern liberals find it difficult and even shaming to look foreigners in the eye when the latter ask them tricky questions. However, one woman in La Grange had been sickened by qualifications and double talk. She gave a straight answer to a straight question:

"Yes, we are all Southerners. Yes, we are for segregation."

And she immediately illustrated this position with the example of her own cook.

"She has worked for me for 22 years. I love and respect her and for her my children are like her own. But I want her to know her place, just as we know ours."

Our acquaintance reddened with embarrassment, but she did not retract what she had said or retreat from it. She immediately collected her things, excused herself to Mr Crowe and left, still mumbling that her cook was like one of her own family and that she paid for her medical treatment and helped her in every way, but that "coloureds" should know their place. She evidently loved her cook and had, in her own way,

become intimate with her. Could not a lord love his serf or a master his dog? He reserves only the right to be angry as well as kind and the right to alternate these two approaches. "Coloureds" must know their place—that sums up both the menace and the paternalism of Southerners; it is also, in the view of Southerners, the key to the happiness of the "coloureds".

In Columbus Mr Reed, editor of the local newspaper, painted a moderately optimistic picture.

"We have avoided the racial disturbances that occurred in Albany, Georgia, and Montgomery, Alabama," Mr Reed told us. "But our people are solid segregationists. Take the airport, for example. The notices have been taken down, but a fight can break out if a black goes into the room for whites. It's true that I once saw a black sitting in the same room as some whites and they were comparatively close together.

"We've been able to desegregate the town's buses. People sometimes sit together now and sometimes whites even sit at the back and blacks at the front. No, I haven't seen that myself, but I've heard about it.

"In January we plan to desegregate cafes, but a lot depends on the behaviour of the blacks. It's important that they don't push too hard, that they go easy.

"There used to be three black policemen, but they were all accused of theft and fired."

The population of Columbus was then 117,000, of whom 42 per cent were blacks.

We drove for a week along the roads and through the towns of Georgia and Alabama, the tall aerials of the two green Fords whipping the

air behind us. The agents sitting in the Fords knew in advance that the two red reporters would invariably visit the office of the local newspapers; then, after seeing the city centre, they would certainly find those sections of town where the scrubbed, sleepy, peaceful face of America "on show" disappeared, the asphalt gave way to gravel, the houses lacked neat green lawns and where, indeed, the houses themselves were not houses but leaning wooden structures, sometimes covered with roofing felt and sometimes standing on piles that made them look like huts on hen's legs.

Before reaching Montgomery, the last city on our journey, we stopped in the tiny town of Tuskegee, Alabama.

We drove into Tuskegee at night and at first we were unable to locate that Main or Broad Street, lit up even at night, which is essential to even the smallest American town. In the morning, however, everything became clear and we found both Main Street and the town square with its garden, in which a bronze confederate soldier stood four-square upon a pedestal.

The history of the civil war in the United States leaves no room for ambiguities: the Northerners beat the Southerners and emancipated the blacks from slavery. Nevertheless, history to the contrary, the bronze soldier stood undefeated and two descendants of the freed slaves cut the grass at his feet. A group of blacks basked in the sun, leaning against the wall of a food store marked "Coloureds Only"—even in late December the sun is warm in the far south of Alabama. In the drugstore, flying in the face of history, the negroes and the Northerners, who returned home

a century ago, postcards were on sale depicting the victoriously flapping flag of the confederates and the glories of Dixieland, the blessed South, the promised land of American slave-owners. In the empty, shadowy court-house on the central square our eyes strayed over familiar notices indicating quite clearly where the place of the whites was and where that of "coloureds". Only the sheriff's door was without these notices: at that time a black could not become a sheriff in Tuskegee. When they saw two white strangers, the men with sheriff's stars on their chests and guns on their hips became watchful, and when we introduced ourselves the head man did not speak, but turned his back, crudely indicating to us that this was no talkative editorial office and that not every white had a place of honour here.

Tuskegee is locked in a lazy state of somnolence. Only cock-crows were lacking to complete the idyll. Dixieland lay before us as if on a postcard. The sky was blue, the grass and trees were green. The soldier stood, clad in dull bronze. Everything was just as we saw it—and it was all a mirage and a deception. The world was split into just two colours, as it was everywhere else in the South.

The ground floor of a small house on the edge of the square was occupied by the editorial offices of the *Tuskegee News*. At the reception desk, which was covered with newspapers, sat a plump, elderly woman. For a quarter of a century she and her husband have owned the *Tuskegee News*, a newspaper with a circulation of 1,500.

The woman's name was Mrs Fisher. She combined the appearance of a matron and housewife with the garrulousness of an American woman

who takes up so-called public work for lack of other occupation. She spoke with the frankness of a person who knows that his convictions are shared by those around him.

"Yes, there are 1,700 people in Tuskegee. Five or six coloureds to every white. We Southerners don't like the blacks as a race. Of course, some of them we like—you meet them on the street or in a shop. But heaven forbid you should invite them to your home! There are more of them than there are of us, but we run the town and the county. Yes, the supreme court allowed them to register as voters, but just imagine what woud have happened if they had all suddenly taken it into their heads to vote! It would have been terrible! We would have had blacks running the town. And they've no education. Of course, we couldn't let that happen. It wasn't easy to find a solution, but we found one all the same—after all, our future depended on it. We changed the borders of the town and the blacks disappeared from the electoral rolls. They were really mad! They boycotted the newspaper and the shops. But everything has been all right so far, thank heaven . . ."

How enviably simple everything was in the world of artless Mrs Fisher—simpler than counting to ten. One is greater than six, if the one is white and the six are black. In her opinion, moreover, the blacks themselves accepted this arithmetic and only rebels wanted to breach the peace of Tuskegee—rebellious communists. Yes, there were communists here, too—Mrs Fisher was sure of it.

She was very frank with no trace of hypocrisy about her.

Oh, the triumphant power of ignorance, doubly sure that it is right when it is collective! If nature had given you a white skin and society a ready-made set of opinions, a group morality and even your exact antithesis to enable you to feel yourself the hereditary possessor of the ultimate truth, you have been robbed of the sacred right to doubt, without which there can be no growth and no progress. From the cradle to the grave you are stifled by the consciousness of automatic superiority over people of other races and views, and whatever one or other "black monkey" does, whatever heights of knowledge and wisdom he scales, you will be sure that he will never gain that Olympus to which you have been raised by the simple fact of birth.

However, the moment must come when you will wake from this deceptive, protracted dream in a cold sweat.

That moment had not yet come for Mrs Fisher, who joined our collection of southern matrons.

I remembered Mrs Fisher with her frankness and conviction well. The clarity of my memory is explained by the contrast she formed with a close neighbour of the *Tuskegee News*. It was this neighbour, in fact, that had made this small, out-of-the-way Alabaman town known. The neighbour was the Tuskegee Institute, renowned as one of the largest, oldest and most respected black institutions of higher education in the United States. At that time it had 2,400 black students, while the number of its black instructors with degrees could well have exceeded the total white population of Tuskegee.

At the institute we found Mr Trout, the public-relation officer, who took the wheel of our Chev-

rolet to drive us to Dr L. H. Foster, president of the Tuskegee Institute. Then Mr Trout noticed in the rear-vision mirror the inseparable Ford with its tall aerial behind us. (There was only one, for the count and his two subordinates had left us at the Georgia border, handing us over to Alabaman FBI agents.) Mr Trout kept glancing in the mirror, at first with incomprehension, then, when he understood, with anxiety, but the Ford did not vanish: it was real, not an illusion. In the president's outer office Mr Trout tried as best he could to conceal his concern and embarrassment, but he was not completely successful, and when his self-control weakened he would twist our credentials—issued by the Foreign Correspondents Center in New York—in his hands and ask:

"So you are from TASS? And you are from *Izvestia?* I see, I see . . ."

And he would look out the window at the parking lot where the special aerial of the green Ford waved like a beacon over the other vehicles. A man with a particular trade sat quietly and patiently in it, a man used to waiting.

Mr Trout would tear his gaze away from the window and forgetfully ask once again, twisting our papers in his hands:

"So you are from *Izvestia?* And you are from TASS? . ."

He was afraid. We would go away, but he had to remain in the strange world of the ignorant and self-confident Mrs Fisher and those like her, who had already imagined the existence of "rebellious communists" in Tuskegee and who might now take our visit as fresh and irrefutable evidence of this fantasy. Among all the other priv-

ileges so liberally bestowed upon Mrs Fisher by the fact of having been born in the South of white parents was that of chatting with Reds without apprehension—she was beyond suspicion. But even the most complaisant black aroused suspicion because of his colour and was seen as a potential opponent: suspicions could grow if he talked to Soviet communists.

Dr Foster, a venerable, elderly black, received us in his sombre, well-furnished study with its carpets and leather armchairs. The college president was calm and measured in manner; he referred to Mrs Fisher with gentle irony as a "philosopher". He gave the impression of being a highly educated, profoundly reflective man, a man of wide and deep understanding. Perhaps this universal knowledge contained the secret both of the strength and the vulnerability of his wisdom, which knew how strong old roots are and was therefore disinclined to believe in radical actions and swift changes. He had, incidentally, noted a trend towards improvement and assured us that everything would be fine if this trend did not meet with opposition.

The whites, he told us, were worried and concerned to see that blacks did not run the town. This was natural, but such feelings would change.

He was ashamed by the paradoxes of Tuskegee. His colleague, Dr Kennedy, could not drink a cup of coffee in a rundown cafe. Yet Dr Kennedy, a black, was the head of the black veterans' hospital beside the institute. The 2,000-bed hospital belonged to the federal Veterans' Agency and had an annual budget of 9 million dollars; it was the largest contributor to the

finances of the country in which Tuskegee is located.

But Dr Kennedy had to "know his place" in Tuskegee, his humiliating position, and it could scarcely have been a consolation to him that this position was side by side with Dr Foster and dozens of other black doctors of philosophy and bachelors of arts. Dr Foster was responsible for more than 2,000 students, many of whom would leave Tuskegee with teaching degrees. Yet he had to live in the shadow of a semi-literate sheriff and of Mrs Fisher, who found nothing strange in declaring to two unknown foreigners her hatred for blacks "as a race". Mr Trout looked anxiously at the tall aerial of the green Ford while his boss told us with tired wisdom of the paradoxes of Tuskegee: after all, you can't kill a dragon with a pocket-knife and in the final analysis no one blazes with impotent indignation all his life. One had to live in Tuskegee, to adapt oneself to the way things were and wait patiently until changes took place in Mrs Fisher's world.

Behind this attitude lay not only several centuries of history but also a philosophy not very flattering to the black citizens of Tuskegee. The story goes back to 1880, when a white namesake of the president, Colonel Foster of the confederate army, was running for the legislative assembly of Alabama and needed the votes of black electors. (One of the long-standing paradoxes of the South is that, during the second half of the 19th century—immediately after the civil war—there were more black electors than at the beginning of the second half of the 20th century.) Foster proposed a deal to the black leader Lewis Adams,

whereby the latter would "deliver" the votes of the black electors of the county; in return, Foster promised, if elected, to obtain funds for a negro school. Foster was elected and the first 2,000 dollars were allocated for the school, which was founded in 1881 and later became the renowned Tuskegee Institute. Booker T. Washington, one of the best known blacks in the history of the United States, was invited to be the school's first head. A gifted educator, he defended the idea of trade training for black Americans. His greatest speech, delivered in 1895 in Atlanta, is even quoted in American encyclopedias. In it he denounced as folly the struggle by blacks for political and social equality before they were economically ready. In fact, he proposed a compromise: blacks would cease to demand social and political equality if the existing authorities would give them the opportunity for trade training. This proposal was greeted with relief by the racist South and wealthy Northern industrialists promised financial assistance to negro schools which followed the advice of Booker T. Washington.

A different attitude towards Washington's ideas was taken by a section of the black intelligentsia. The great William Du Bois declared that, as a result of these ideas, "the Negro in the United States would be doomed to second-rate citizenship, second-rate education, and second-rate employment opportunity".

Booker T. Washington, who enjoyed the favour of white America, remained head of the Tuskegee Institute until his death in 1915. The ideas he bequeathed retained their force among blacks living in the county surrounding Tuskegee until quite recently. Although blacks constituted 84

per cent of the population—a very high proportion even for the South—and the Tuskegee Institute was renowned for its gifted scholars and administrators, black leaders, fearing to provoke the racists, refused in principle to attempt to breach the political and economic hegemony of the white minority.

This partly explained the shameful fact that, as late as December 1961, Dr Foster and Dr Kennedy—two of the most worthy men in the district—could be openly humiliated at the local cafe or the motel, four miles from the town, although we two white foreigners were admitted to the same motel without hesitation.

The history of Tuskegee has seen many changes of course. One occurred quite a long time ago when, in 1901, the state of Alabama changed its constitution in such a way as virtually to remove blacks from the electoral rolls of the county surrounding Tuskegee. This was done through the introduction of literacy test. In order to register as an elector, would-be voters had to read, summarise and explain provisions of the US or Alabaman constitutions—this, moreover, before white registering officers, who did not usually agree with these explanations. Affidavits also had to be obtained from two whites—and who would give such affidavits?

After these constitutional innovations the majority of the county's population was deprived of voting rights. This, it may be noted, did not, in fact, run contrary to the teaching of Booker T. Washington. The position remained unchanged for decades. In 1940, for example, the county had only 29 registered black electors. However, when their number began to increase white con-

cern rose. Although for more than seventy years the black citizens of Tuskegee had demonstrated their loyalty to their status quo and their unwillingness to aggravate relations, in 1957 the racist white minority legislature changed the town borders of Tuskegee in such a way that 420 black electors were removed from the voting rolls, leaving only ten registered black electors.

Mrs Fisher had told us of this triumph. Moreover, her comment that "the coloureds accept this arithmetic" had not been so far from the truth.

(Looking ahead, we may note that the arithmetic changed within a few years when a federal court decision restored the former town borders of Tuskegee. In 1964 the number of registered black electors in the county exceeded the number of white electors. By 1966 the voting rolls included 6,803 black and only 4,495 white Americans. In the town of Tuskegee, too, black electors were in a majority. However, a section of their leaders continued to be apprehensive of making full use of this fact. Strange as it may seem, Lucius Emerson, a black, was elected sheriff of the county in 1966 in face of their opposition. The Tuskegee "Uncle Toms" spoke in favour of . . . a white sheriff. On the Tuskegee council blacks, although constituting a majority of electors, gained two places, yielding three to whites, again as a result of the timorous policy of concessions.

In the summer of 1965 the students of the Tuskegee Institute initiated a campaign in support of desegregation, organising sit-ins at "white" cafes, picketing shops and entering "white" churches, where they were savagely beaten on two occasions. In January a student called Sam-

my Young was shot by a racist. Jurors, exclusively white, as always, justified the murder. For a section of Tuskegee's black citizens, student demonstrations rather than this murder were a cause for indignation. They regarded students as "out-of-control radical street demonstrators".

Yes, there are still blacks who accept the arithmetic of white racists. Yes, there are still blacks without a feeling of personal dignity, who clown for the benefit of whites. After all, an intelligent person endowed with inner strength runs great risks. Three hundred years of slavery and oppression cannot pass without trace. Indeed, it would be unthinking, naive and sentimental to imagine from afar that membership of a social or racial group struggling for freedom and equality automatically bestows upon each member of this group irreproachable virtues.

"Like all people, they (i.e. blacks—*S.K.*) have differing personalities, diverse financial interests and varied aspirations," Martin Luther King correctly noted. "There are Negroes who will never fight for freedom. There are Negroes who will seek profit for themselves alone from the struggle. There are even some Negroes who will cooperate with their oppressors. These facts should distress no one. Every minority and every people has its share of opportunists, profiteers, freeloaders and escapists... No one can pretend that because a people may be oppressed, every individual member is virtuous and worthy. The real issue is whether in the great mass the dominant characteristics are decency, honor and courage."

But it is time to conclude this description of our trip to the South, an account which had be-

come protracted and perhaps tedious for the reader. Our journey was virtually at an end when we arrived in Montgomery. From there we flew in a Delta Airlines plane to New York. All the seats in the aircraft were occupied except one—beside the sole black passenger. We left for New York on December 30. The plane was packed with New Year travellers and we were able to obtain tickets only at the airport check-in (not, I think, without the covert help of our guardians from the FBI, who were in a hurry to clear their books for the holiday). As I sat in the aeroplane, looking at the empty seat beside the black passenger, I was able to appreciate the diplomatic qualities and even self-sacrifice of the airline. Prevented from segregating air transport between segregated Montgomery and desegregated New York, it had been able, by failing to find a "seatmate" for the black passenger, to avoid an unpleasant racial conflict in the air at the cost of a lost seat.

At Montgomery airport we parted from our trusty Chevrolet as easily as we had acquired it: I was pleasantly struck by the fact that, in calculating our bill, the clerk took our word for the number of miles we had covered without checking the speedometer. In the clean, bright, comfortable airport building modern civilisation and medieval practices once again stood in glaring contrast. There were two waiting rooms—for whites and "coloureds"—and the builders, sparing no expense, had also provided separate toilets for whites and "coloureds".

While the aeroplane flew over Alabama I jotted down my final impressions, glancing at the empty place beside the black passenger and the

newspaper rack by the pilot's cabin, where a black bible stood like a safeguard of the South.

Today I regret that there are almost no impressions of Montgomery among my notes, although we were there for less than 24 hours at the very end of our trip. History that has stood still often takes pride of place over the flow of contemporary life and the Tuskegee of Booker T. Washington had hidden Montgomery from me—the starting point of Martin Luther King's journey.

King took another path. He knew all thirteen Southern states like his own five fingers, after crossing and recrossing them during his courageous "freedom rides". He learned what the weight of a club on one's back felt like, the loathsome experience of others spitting in one's face. His black pastor's suit was ripped more than once by a policeman's grasp and he knew what the blue Southern sky looked like through the bars of a cell window. He had three children and every evening he brought danger home to them in Atlanta, where he had moved to preach together with his father at the Ebenezer Baptist Church and where he had established the headquarters of his Southern Christian Leadership Conference. The SCLC already had dozens of branches and thousands of activists in the towns and cities of the South and the crosses of the Ku Klux Klan had blazed more than once on the lawn in front of his house. King, the eternal wanderer, would telephone home from far away to learn if his wife and children were still alive and well.

However, heroes, the men and women who are the conscience of their nations, are only tempered by such experiences—they do not break.

Martin Luther King was known in America; he was followed by reporters, members of the Ku Klux Klan and agents of the FBI. But his fame had not yet spread beyond the bounds of the United States and as a novice in America I encountered him for the very first time in December 1961—in the pages of the press and on television screens in the motels of Georgia and Alabama.

King was not far away. At that moment he was being held in Americus prison outside Albany, in the southern part of Georgia.

However, we were unable to include Albany in our itinerary: for us it was a closed town.

We were studying the arithmetic of segregation while King was engrossed in the elementary algebra of struggle against it. As we came to know the psychology of white Southerners, we realised how truly terrible this force was—the force of habit of millions of people who have inherited the commandment of racism from their fathers and grandfathers. King knew not only this problem but also that of another psychology. He knew how difficult it was to squeeze the slave's servility, the slave's inferiority complex, inherited from fathers and grandfathers, out of himself, out of those close to him and out of millions of dark-skinned slaves.

In Rome, Tuskegee and Chattanooga we had felt the concealed current of racial tension so typical of the southern United States. In Albany the sparks were already flying: eleven black students (ten from other areas and one from Albany) had scorned the bans and boldly entered the waiting room for whites at the railway station on December 10.

This was the time of the famous "freedom rides", guerrilla raids on the ramified system of segregation by the young heroes of the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee. Groups of young people would appear at bus or railway stations or in shops, cafes or motels and sit or lie down on the floor. Sit-ins and lie-ins disrupted the established course of life and prevented business. Police seized them and they were dragged off to local lock-ups, where they were sometimes savagely beaten. White students from the North were the object of particular fury, for the racists regarded them as traitors. King came to the aid of the students with his "direct mass action".

This had also happened in Albany. Students were arrested and a day later hundreds of Albany people came out on to the streets to demonstrate in protest. A further 267 people were arrested.

On December 15 King flew to Albany from Atlanta. He was awaited as people await justice, as they await a miracle-worker. (Back in the days of the Montgomery boycott, when King had become famous and popular, he once remarked ironically: "A man who hits the peak at twenty-seven has a tough job ahead. People will be expecting me to pull rabbits out of a hat for the rest of my life.") The local Baptist church was not large enough to hold the 1,500 people who had gathered and many stood outside in the drizzle. King's aeroplane was delayed by the bad weather and people waited five hours for him in the rain. His name had, indeed, a special magnetism.

King declared in a short speech that they could not slow down their movement. They could not permit themselves to subscribe to the doctrine of

gradualism. Gradualism led to do-nothingism and that meant preserving the present position. Blacks demanded all their rights and they demanded them now! Those present at the meeting began by demanding that the people arrested be freed by 10 am on December 16.

But King's magnetism had no effect on Albany's mayor, Asa Kelley, or its police chief, Laurie Pritchett. They had already visited Jackson, Mississippi, to consult with the head of the police force there, a man known for his ability to counter the tactic of "mass action" with the tactic of mass arrests.

On December 16 about 600 blacks marched on City Hall, led by King and an Albany black, Dr Anderson.

Three blocks from City Hall the demonstrators found the road closed by Laurie Pritchett. The barricade was manned by policemen, while from the roof of a nearby hotel events were watched by national guardsmen. Laurie Pritchett approached King and demanded his official permit for the march. No permit for the march. No permit had been issued. Laurie Pritchett ordered the marchers to disperse, using a megaphone. The marchers refused. They were then surrounded and taken to a lane adjoining the prison. They had demonstrated peacefully, without violence, and Laurie Pritchett had arrested them without violence. More than 700 blacks were locked up in the local jails. King and Anderson found themselves in the same cell. King was 32, but the jailers contemptuously called him "boy". He was loved and respected by many thousands of people, but for the jailers he was a "nigger"—less than human and a criminal.

King refused to post bond and go free. He wanted the demonstration to continue, for a thousand people at least to be arrested and for students to make a Christmas pilgrimage to Albany, hitting the businessmen of Albany in their pockets by wrecking the Christmas shopping season, the most profitable in the year. But a section of the Albany blacks were afraid of these "extremes" and the vengeance of the whites. "King and the others will go away," said one of the local leaders, "but we have to live here."

Before Christmas a two-month "truce" was concluded. Riding the wave of the Albany events, King called upon President John Kennedy to issue a second proclamation on the emancipation of the blacks—almost 100 years after the first, signed by Abraham Lincoln. He reminded the president of his pledge before the election to end segregation in housing with "a stroke of the pen" and of other promises made in pre-election speeches. But government support was purely symbolic. Robert Kennedy, the president's brother, limited himself to a telephone call to the mayor of Albany in which he tried to persuade him to observe federal rules on inter-state passenger transport, which prohibited discrimination at stations and terminals.

With intervals the Albany campaign continued for many months, concluding in the summer of 1962. Black Americans demonstrated and went to prison, answering King's call to carry out the Gandhian motto—"Fill up the jails". But, of course, it was easier to go to jail than to a white cafe—up to 5 per cent of Albany's blacks were in prison, while not one sat in a cafe. It was easier than visiting a park or a library or trav-

elling in a bus—the Albany authorities closed the parks and libraries and even stopped the public buses in order to maintain segregation. The national press—which usually means the New York newspapers and television—expressed sympathy with the black strugglers, but Albany's racists resisted re-education through non-violence and continued to believe in the rightness of their own cause.

King was defeated in this campaign, which was second in terms of scale to the Montgomery bus boycott. His critics declared non-violence dead. But King did not lose heart.

"Human beings with all their faults and strengths constitute the mechanism of a social movement," he wrote later. "They must make mistakes and learn from them, make more mistakes and learn anew. They must taste defeat as well as success, and discover how to live with each. Time and action are the teachers."

King tasted defeat and was ready to learn from his mistakes and to talk of revolution. He was stubborn, ferociously stubborn in the American style, although he knew that the more stubborn he became the greater was the possibility that sooner or later accounts would be settled with him.

THE BIRMINGHAM BELL

Before embarking on the Birmingham chapter of this chronicle, I wish to quote two references. The first is taken from the *Columbia Encyclopedia.*

"Birmingham. Industrial city (pop. 340, 887),

co. seat of Jefferson co, N. central Ala., in the Jones Valley near the southern end of the Appalachian system. It is the largest city in the state and the leading iron and steel center in the South. Iron, coal, limestone, and other materials from the area supply the city's great iron and steel plants and its metal working factories. Textile products, chemicals and cement are also made. Founded and incorporated in 1871, Birmingham grew swiftly. Its rapid industrial development resulted from the advantages of its natural resources and the expansion of the railroads . . . On nearby Red Mt. is a huge iron statue of Vulcan overlooking the city. Birmingham is the seat of Howard College (Baptist; coeducational; 1841) and Miles College (Methodist Episcopal; coeducational; 1907). The Univ. of Alabama has its medical college and dental school here. Birmingham-Southern College (Methodist; coeducational) was formed in 1918 by the merger of Southern Univ. (chartered 1856; opened 1859 at Greensboro, Ala.) and Birmingham College (opened 1898). The Birmingham Conservatory of Music became a part of the college in 1953 . . ."

This brief reference does not mention that, of Birmingham's 340,887 residents, 135,332—that is, two-fifths—are black. We shall keep that fact in mind as we look at Birmingham in 1963 through the eyes of an Afro-American. Martin Luther King gives us that opportunity in his book *Why We Can't Wait,* which deals with the Birmingham stage of the struggle for racial equality.

Our second reference comes from King's book.

"If you had visited Birmingham before the

third of April in the one-hundredth-anniversary year of the Negro's emancipation, you might have come to a startling conclusion. You might have concluded that here was a city which had been trapped for decades in a Rip Van Winkle slumber; a city whose fathers had apparently never heard of Abraham Lincoln, Thomas Jefferson, the Bill of Rights, the Preamble to the Constitution, the Thirteenth, Fourteenth and Fifteenth Amendments or the 1954 decision of the United States Supreme Court outlawing segregation in the public schools.

"If your powers of imagination were great enough to enable you to place yourself in the position of a Negro baby born and brought up to physical maturity in Birmingham, you would have pictured your life in the following manner:

"You would be born in a jim-crow hospital to parents who probably lived in a ghetto. You would attend a jim-crow school. It is not really true that the city fathers had never heard of the Supreme Court's school-desegregation order. They had heard of it and, since its passage, had consistently expressed their defiance, typified by the prediction of one official that blood would run in the streets before desegregation would be permitted to come to Birmingham.

"You would spend your childhood playing mainly in the streets because the 'colored' parks were abysmally inadequate. When a federal court order banned park segregation, you would find that Birmingham closed down its parks and gave up its baseball team rather than integrate them . . .

". . . If your family attended church, you would go to a Negro church. If you wanted to visit a

church attended by white people, you would not be welcome. For although your white fellow citizens would insist that they were Christians, they practised segregation as rigidly in the house of God as they did in the theatre.

"If you loved music and yearned to hear the Metropolitan Opera on its tour of the South, you could not enjoy this privilege. Nor could your white fellow music lovers, for the Metropolitan had discontinued scheduling Birmingham on its national tours after it had adopted a policy of not performing before segregated audiences.

"If you wanted to contribute to and be a part of the work of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, you would not be able to join a local branch. In the state of Alabama, segregationist authorities had been successful in enjoining the N.A.A.C.P. from performing the civil-rights work by declaring it a 'foreign corporation' and rendering its activities illegal.

"If you wanted a job in this city—one of the greatest iron- and steel-producing centers in the nation—you had better settle on doing menial work as a porter or laborer. If you were fortunate enough to get a job, you could expect that promotions to a better status or more pay would come, not to you, but to a white employee regardless of your comparative talents. On your job, you would eat in a separate place and use a water fountain and lavatory labeled 'Colored' in conformity to city-wide ordinances.

"If you believed your history books and thought of America as a country whose governing officials—whether city, state or nation—are selected by the governed, you would be swiftly

disillusioned when you tried to exercise your right to register and vote. You would be confronted with every conceivable obstacle to take that most important walk a Negro American can take today—the walk to the ballot box. Of the 80,000 voters in Birmingham, prior to January, 1963, only 10,000 were Negroes. Your race, constituting two-fifths of the city's population, would make up one-eighth of its voting strength.

"You would be living in a city where brutality directed against Negroes was an unquestioned and unchallenged reality. One of the city commissioners, a member of the body that ruled municipal affairs, would be Eugene 'Bull' Connor, a racist who prided himself on knowing how to handle the Negro and keep him in his 'place'.

"As Commissioner of Public Safety, Bull Connor, entrenched for many years in a key position in the Birmingham power structure, displayed as much contempt for the rights of the Negro as he did defiance for the authority of the federal government.

"You would have found a general atmosphere of violence and brutality in Birmingham. Local racists have intimidated, mobbed and even killed Negroes with impunity. One of the more vivid and recent examples of the terror of Birmingham was the castration of a Negro man, whose mutilated body had then been abandoned on a lonely road. No Negro home was protected from bombings and burnings. From the year 1957 through January of 1963, while Birmingham was still claiming that its Negroes were 'satisfied', seventeen unsolved bombings of Negro churches and homes of civil-rights leaders had occurred.

"Negroes were not the only persons who suffered

because of Bull Connor's rule. It was Birmingham's Safety Commissioner who, in 1961, arrested the manager of the local station when the latter sought to obey the law of the land by serving Negroes. Although a federal district judge condemned Connor in strong terms for this action and released the victim, the fact remained that in Birmingham, early in 1963, no places of public accommodation were integrated except the bus station, the train station and the airport.

"In Bull Connor's Birmingham, you would be a resident of a city where a United States senator, visiting to deliver a speech, had been arrested because he walked through a door marked 'Colored'.

"In Connor's Birmingham, the silent password was fear. It was a fear not only on the part of the black oppressed, but also in the hearts of the white oppressors. Guilt was a part of their fear. There was also the dread of change, that all too prevalent fear which hounds those whose attitudes have been hardened by the long winter of reaction. Many were apprehensive of social ostracism. Certainly Birmingham had its white moderates who disapproved of Bull Connor's tactics. Certainly Birmingham had its decent white citizens who privately deplored the maltreatment of Negroes. But they remained publicly silent. It was a silence born of fear—fear of social, political and economic reprisals. The ultimate tragedy of Birmingham was not the brutality of the bad people, but the silence of the good people.

"In Birmingham, you would be living in a community where the white man's long-lived tyranny had cowed your people, led them to abandon

hope, and developed in them a false sense of inferiority . . .

". . . You would be living in the largest city of a police state, presided over by a governor—George Wallace—whose inauguration vow had been a pledge of 'segregation now, segregation tomorrow, segregation forever!' You would be living, in fact, in the most segregated city in America . . ."

What can be added to this reference, in which the tension born of hostility is cloaked by the impartiality of an information bulletin? That the castrated black's name was Aaron? That in May 1961 a gang of hooligans savagely beat up two "freedom riders" at the bus station, a black named Charles Person and James Peck, a white student, the police intervening only when both men were already unconscious? That in 1956 the crosses of the Ku Klux Klan burned fifty or sixty times, heralding anti-black terror?

Or that at the same time as elementary human justice had yet to be restored, scientific progress was still continuing inexorably and the American John Glenn had followed Yuri Gagarin and Herman Titov into space, from where he could see our small planet from the porthole of his Friendship 7 craft?

Or that the surge towards freedom strengthened and that the true hero of 1962 in the United States was James Meredith, a black who was then the best known student in the world? He registered as a student at the "lily-white" University of Mississippi with the help of 16,000 soldiers, 500 federal marshals and two of the Kennedy brothers—the president and the attorney-general.

On this occasion, then, the goal did not seek out the man, as happened in Albany, where King, unprepared, tried without success to complete what had been begun by a student "freedom ride". In Birmingham King and his associates chose their goal—and what a goal! They took aim at the solar plexus of racism, dreaming the heady dream of going on from victory in Birmingham to break the back of segregation throughout the country. For them "Bull" Connor was the personification of resistance. This respectable-looking, plump-faced, grey-haired gentleman wore expensive, well-pressed suits, horn-rimmed glasses and colourful neckties. He carried a briefcase, not a club, but he was not embarrassed by his nickname: on the contrary, he was proud of it and justified it by his demonstrative intolerance of any attempt at desegregation.

Behind him, looking out from the governor's mansion in Montgomery, stood the unimpressive but unyielding figure of the fanatic George Wallace. Wallace was a man who had already vowed to maintain segregation for ever and barred the doors of Alabama's universities to blacks with his own body before the eyes of the entire nation; a man who would go on to elect his own wife governor with the votes of white Alabamans when the state constitution prevented him from running for a second term; a man who, in 1964 and 1968, would make successful pre-election sorties into some of the industrial cities of the North; a man who, finally, would survive King and shake America by his bid for the presidency as the candidate of a third "independent American party".

The stakes were high in the Birmingham cam-

paign and the opposition strong. Moreover, the risks were great, for in a country where the philosophy of success—and sensational and unbroken success at that—flourishes, there is no pity for failures, who are soon forgotten in the hectic rush of US life. After the failure in Albany, defeat in Birmingham would deal a fatal blow to "the symbol of non-violence".

King had been accused with some justification of neglecting organisational details, but on this occasion he and his associates made painstaking preparations. Tactics were polished, people studied and money collected. Of course, King was not working alone. There were always others around him and at his side was always Ralph Abernathy, his right hand, who accompanied him on his travels, usually shared his hotel room and who, on April 4, 1968, was the first to bend over the body of his slain friend. Raised above the others by his authority as a national leader, his ability to rouse people to action and his gift for speaking precisely, fierily, loftily and yet in the earthy language of his people, King gathered around himself devoted brothers-in-arms and able organisers. He was the first among equals and each of his fellows, occupied with his own affairs, did not dispute King's leadership, understanding how valuable King's magnetic force was to their movement. This force sprang from King's self-sacrifice and self-denial, his ability to involve himself wholly in the cause and his habit of asking more of himself than of others.

The way was paved for King's appearance on the Birmingham stage by the actions of Pastor Fred Shuttlesworth, head of the Alabama Christian Movement for Human Rights, a group which

merged with King's organisation. "You have to be prepared to die before you can begin to live," Shuttlesworth once observed. He was ready to die and so he lived fearlessly. King called him "one of the nation's most courageous freedom fighters". Like King, Shuttlesworth was a Baptist minister; like King, too, he lived under the perpetual threat of death and both his house and his church had frequently been bombed by racists. He had been thrown into prison more than once and had an intimate knowledge of the ways of "Bull" Connor. The atmosphere of terror in Birmingham did not frighten Shuttlesworth's group, which had obtained a court order on the desegregation of public places of leisure; following this the authorities closed the city's parks. At the beginning of 1962 the "Alabama Christians" supported the students of Miles College in a boycott of white shopkeepers.

Shuttlesworth's group provided the first proven activists when an ultra-secret file entitled "Project C" (Confrontation)—confrontation in Birmingham—was opened at King's Atlanta headquarters.

King had learned a valuable lesson from his Albany failure: to ensure maximum impact, he had to concentrate his forces and aim them at a single target. In Birmingham the chosen target was the city's shopkeepers; specifically, its segregated lunch-counters.

Lunch-counters—those words recurred constantly in accounts of the Birmingham events of 1963, following which America began to speak of the "Negro revolution".

Lunch-counters and revolution are an unexpected combination. Buses in Montgomery, lunch-

counters in Birmingham—what small goals were chosen by a man who did not weary of repeating that he wanted all human rights now and who once pronounced the splendid words that "to be half-free is as impossible as to be half-alive".

However, Martin Luther King made his preparations, gathering an army and setting it goals everyone could understand.

Lunch-counters were the product of a simple but accurate calculation. If a shopper has to leave a store to find a hot-dog, he or she will probably not come back. It is therefore in the shopkeeper's interest to provide a snack-bar on his premises. Shopkeepers did not scorn to accept black dollars and cents, but to see blacks and whites side by side at a counter in the South in 1963 seemed equivalent to the end of the world. The refusal to serve food to blacks, thus humiliating them in the very place where their dollars were accepted, meant that desegregating lunch-counters also had a symbolic significance. After all, every black shopping in a department store would sooner or later experience the humiliation of finding the lunch-counter barred to him.

And so sit-ins began at lunch-counters, despite the risk of arrests and beatings. A parallel boycott of shops also commenced. Since 40 per cent of Birmingham's population was black, a mass boycott would mean a fall in the number of shoppers that would spell the difference, terrible to the shopkeeper, between profit and loss.

Finally, marches began, bringing open confrontation and representing a direct challenge on the streets to "Bull" Connor and all other racists.

The decision was taken to talk the language

most comprehensible to Americans—the language of the dollar. To ensure that the conversation carried greater weight, the beginning of the campaign was fixed for Easter, which began in 1963 on April 14. In the United States Easter is the second most important season for commerce after Christmas.

At training centres Southern Christian Leadership Conference volunteers learned the methods of non-violence and "direct action". Everyone signed a "Commitment Card" to the movement, pledging himself to keep its ten commandments, which mingled religious vows with militant pledges. The first commandment was to "meditate daily on the teachings and life of Jesus". The fifth was to "sacrifice personal wishes in order that all men might be free", the eighth to "refrain from the violence of fist, tongue, or heart" and the tenth to "follow the directions of the movement and of the captain on a demonstration".

This unique army rejected all physical weapons, even penknives, which some wanted to take, not as a weapon against police clubs, but as protection against vicious police-dogs specially trained to attack "coloureds". "We proved ... that we needed no weapons—not so much as a toothpick," King wrote of the volunteers. "We proved that we possessed the most formidable weapon of all—the conviction that we were right. We had the protection of our knowledge that we were more concerned about realizing our righteous aims than about saving our skins."

"Fill up the jails!"—that slogan was fulfilled in Birmingham, too. The protesters were ready for prison, for the jailing of thousands of blacks —the more, the better.

However, in order to prevent these planned thousands of people from staying in prison long and to ensure that families were not deprived of their breadwinners, money was needed—a large bail fund. King and Shuttlesworth went to New York—where else? At the apartment of the famous black singer Harry Belafonte, a handsome, talented and wealthy man, they met several dozen sympathetic businessmen, clergymen and people from the arts. The meeting, like all the preparations for the campaign, was secret. A committee was established to collect funds and Harry Belafonte, who headed it, addressed himself vigorously and with success to an unfamiliar activity.

Wyatt Tee Walker, one of King's assistants, made a secret reconnaissance of the locality—Birmingham's shopping areas. Walking the streets, he selected target stores, marking their entrances and exits on a map, and looked through the windows of lunch-counters, checking the number of "landing spots" in order to know in advance how many people would be required for each mission. In the event that the approaches to some targets might be blocked, reserve targets were marked.

Even the day of King's arrest was planned in advance; or, rather, the day when he himself would lead a march and would, therefore, be arrested and put in prison.

At the end of March King arrived in Birmingham, where he established his temporary headquarters at the Gaston Motel, which belonged to a wealthy black.

Despite painstaking preparations, the situation remained complex and the chances of success

unsure. A group of 250 volunteers was ready, but could they shake Birmingham's 135,000 blacks ?

The organisers of the campaign initially encountered resistance from many black clergymen and businessmen influential in the local community. The latter were, firstly, afraid. Secondly, they nourished illusions. They did not believe in success, feared disorder and the intensification of racist terror and were apprehensive that, in terms of personal gain, they stood to lose rather than gain from King's marches. They were "in the good books" of the city's white masters and valued their reputation as loyal, law-abiding—racist law-abiding—citizens. As King correctly noted, by capitulating internally such blacks had accepted the white man's theory that they were inferior. "Half-freedom" on a racist leash, servility and civic inactivity suited them, since it gave them the opportunity to exist, if not to live.

In company with the liberal New York press and the attorney-general, Robert Kennedy, who supported the idea of desegregation in principle, these blacks believed that the campaign was "badly timed". Elections had just been held in Birmingham and "Bull" Connor, running for mayor, had been defeated by Albert Boutwell, a moderate segregationist. On April 3 the *Birmingham News* carried the optimistic headline "New Day Dawns for Birmingham". A section of Birmingham's blacks, resting their hopes on the new mayor's moderation, were ready yet again to wait for an improvement.

Finally, they saw King as an outsider, an imported agitator, a disturber of the peace. He

would stir things up—they would have to live with the resultant situation.

King undertook the difficult task of explaining and persuading, of dispelling fear, illusions and suspicion. Every day he addressed groups of influential blacks, striving to achieve understanding and gain support. He told his audiences that their cause was a common one. The key to success lay in unity and solidarity and no black, wherever he lived and whatever his social or financial position, status or views were, could stand aside while the dignity of a single black-skinned child in Mississippi, Alabama or Georgia was trampled upon.

And so the spring, summer and autumn of Birmingham 1963 began, rumbling like the first salvoes in the first general offensive against US racism, an offensive prepared by the heroism of the first hundreds, who took a deadly risk to spill the already brimming cup of protest of millions of others. These salvoes, not the election of Albert Boutwell, heralded a new day, a new age of struggle, which raised King to the heights of fame and prestige before casting the Memphis bullet that felled him.

April 3, the first day of confrontation, came and went almost unnoticed. Thirty volunteers penetrated Birmingham's shopping centre and, precisely according to schedule, entered Britt's Department Store, Woolworth's and Loveman's, where they dashed to the forbidden stools of the lunch-counters. They were arrested and sent to prison.

In the evening a meeting was held at a black church—the first of 65 mobilising meetings. It was attended by 500 blacks. "We are heading

for freedom land and nothing is going to stop us," King declared. Ralph Abernathy concluded his speech with the words to a white reporter: "Tell 'em we're going to rock this town like it has never been rocked before".

The days were filled with marches and arrests, the evenings with meetings of solidarity and protest, mobilising the masses. Day followed day, march followed march, meeting followed meeting, as the unsure trying of the ropes by bell-ringers and the first timid, test peal are followed by the first, thundering strokes of a great bell. Blacks had to believe in their united might and to strike surely and without tiring—then the entire overwhelming powerful tocsin would flow over the land, dispelling anxiety and broadcasting a promise of struggle, sacrifice and triumph.

Oh, those meetings in churches which took the place of public halls, the dark faces gleaming in the shadows, the rumble of deep-voiced orator priests and the answering cries from the audience, encouraging themselves and the people on the stage—yes, yes, oh yes!

And the freedom songs, the soul of the freedom movement! They served a glorious cause, those songs, reworked from the old songs of the slaves that blacks absorb with their mothers' milk. They united people with their swinging rhythm and their familiar, simple, emotion-filled words. "We shall overcome ... we shall overcome some day..." the words of a favourite anthem rang out like a pledge and after them came the concluding call to the excited masses—to register as volunteers for the following day's march.

During the first days the marches were small, but they gradually increased in strength. The boycott of shops succeeded: improvised checkpoints recorded only twenty or so black customers in the city's shopping district in the course of a day.

And the jails filled up.

The police dogs and police clubs made their first appearance on April 7, Palm Sunday, but in general "Bull" Connor conducted himself with rare restraint. His subordinates, too, avoided violence. By concealing his iron fist in a velvet glove Birmingham's chief of police displayed his cunning, for the moratorium on brutality he declared damped down the drama of the struggle, formally translating it into a clash between "law" and "lawlessness". Moreover, "law" was on the side of those who observed order, since the blacks of Birmingham were marching without official permission.

In ten days the police arrested 450 people. In general, the campaign was going according to plan, but something was not right and the "constructive tension" King sought for was absent.

The day came when King was to lead the next march and thus deliver himself into the hands of the police. On the evening before he conferred with his friends and colleagues at the Gaston Motel. The movement's bail fund had been depleted following the hundreds of arrests and the city authorities, sensing this, were demanding immediate payment for the release of prisoners. King, by using his name and making personal appeals to sympathisers, could replenish the fund—but only while he was free. What would happen if he were arrested the following

day? But what would be said of him if, having indirectly sent hundreds of people to prison, he himself shunned arrest by failing to appear at a march on the day announced? He could be declared a self-seeker and a coward—and his prestige, capital no less important than the bail fund, was the prestige of the movement. After agonising hesitation and despite the persuasion of his friends, he decided to sacrifice expediency to principle. He must keep his word—to acquire the reputation of a deceiver was the greatest danger.

On April 12 King and Abernathy were the first to leave Zion Hill Church. There were no more than 50 people on the march, but five prison vehicles, one hundred police and "Bull" Connor himself, there personally to give the order for the arrest of his principal enemy, were waiting for them. Wearing jeans and work-shirts, the clothes chosen as most appropriate for marches and prison, the two leaders approached the police line. An order to disperse was given, was refused—and two policemen roughly seized them by the collar and bundled them into a prison truck.

In prison, King and Abernathy were parted, at first from the others and then from each other. King was thrown into a solitary cell and was not immediately allowed to see a lawyer. Coretta, who had remained in Atlanta, was tormented by the lack of news. At the end of March she had become the mother of their fourth child, a girl named Bernice Albertine, but the happy father could spend only a few days with his new daughter. The family was together extremely rarely. King hurried to his other "child"—the

Birmingham campaign, which was under way. And now he had disappeared behind prison walls. Coretta feared for his life, knowing that his fame was a temptation rather than an obstacle to the racists into whose hands he had fallen. She took energetic action, telephoning the White House. The president was not in Washington, but was vacationing on his father's estate at Palm Beach. Coretta was connected with Pierre Salinger, president's press-secretary, and then with Robert Kennedy. She told him of her anxiety for her husband's life.

Within 24 hours the telephone rang at the Kings' Atlanta home. The president of the United States was on the line. He told Coretta that he could not intervene in the actions of the Birmingham authorities or release Doctor King from prison, but that FBI agents had, at his instructions, visited King in prison. The president was glad to inform Mrs King that her husband was alive and well. A quarter of an hour later her husband telephoned.

It was the second time under unusual circumstances—those of prison—that Martin Luther King and John Kennedy had met at a remove. The first such meeting had taken place in late October 1960, at the height of the presidential battle between Kennedy and Nixon, a few weeks before the early morning of November 8 when the young senator from Massachusetts had woken to see secret-service agents outside his window—there to guard the newly-elected president of the United States. At the end of October Senator Kennedy had been moving with lightning speed across the country, delivering the last of hundreds of electoral speeches, while Reverend

King, his legs shackled, was languishing in a solitary cell in Georgia. He had been arrested for trying to enter a "white" restaurant in Rich's Department Store in Atlanta, but his sentence of four months hard labour had been given for driving in Georgia on an Alabama license. When he heard of the crimes of this Georgian convict, Senator Kennedy had expressed his sympathy to Coretta King in a politically calculated telephone conversation angled towards the press, while Robert Kennedy, his brother and chief electoral strategist, had persuaded the judge to release King on bail of 2,000 dollars. This episode, occurring just before the elections, received wide publicity, as the Kennedy brothers had foreseen. A race was on for the votes of black electors. Martin's father, moved by the brothers' action, publicly endorsed John Kennedy's candidacy (King himself refrained from this step). It is difficult to estimate the importance of the prompt and effective intervention of the Kennedy brothers, but if we recall that the two presidential candidates were level at the very end of the race and that Kennedy received more black votes than Nixon, although he outstripped his rival by a total of only 118,000 votes overall, we may confidently accept the view of many experts who believe that Nixon's "non-intervention" in the King affair cost him the presidency in 1960.

Now, in April 1963, President Kennedy calmed Coretta's fears and helped her husband to gain access to a lawyer and a telephone, although at the national level he maintained a "neutral" position between those struggling for equality and the racists during the first stage of the Birmingham campaign.

King spent eight days behind bars. He thought, of course, about his small children—two girls and two boys. He thought of his wife, again thrown into a state of anxiety—constant anxiety for her husband and children and now for a new, still fragile life. But he did not think only of them. Always he carried in himself, in his heart, the voices, gestures, eyes, faces, the first shy words of black youngsters; merging in his memory and overlaying each other, these created two symbolic images, which he loved to write and speak about—a boy from a dirty street in New York's Harlem and a girl on the dilapidated porch of an Alabama hovel—two abandoned, sad children, already terribly vulnerable to the cruel insights of the adult world, in which a place of humiliation and persecution was awaiting them from the moment of their birth. As his mind ran over those insights, he recalled how they could crush a person. He remembered his mother and that shattering day when she had revealed to a five-year-old Martin the awful fact that he had been born black in a world ruled by whites.

Now he was in her position. His six-year-old daughter and five-year-old son were already torturing him with the same questions.

Ultimately, he was fighting to ensure that his children and the boy from Harlem and the girl from Alabama would grow up in a world and a society where that crushing and, for many, mortal insight would never come. Now a new life had come into his house. Would this child, too, some day demand explanations of him that were more terrible than anything else in the world?

King burned with impatience. In thinking of

children, he thought of his own cause. He had been accused of haste. By whom? By white clergymen, colleagues who had, moreover, the reputation of supporting equal rights. The well known preacher Billy Graham had publicly advised Reverend King "to put the brakes on a little bit". Eight Birmingham clergymen, moderates, who had even been emboldened to allow blacks into their churches, issued "An Appeal for Law and Order and Common Sense". Their common sense condemned the black movement as "unwise and untimely", while their interpretation of law and order amounted to praise of "Bull" Connor for his "restraint". The clergymen called on the black population of Birmingham "to withdraw support from these demonstrations" and referred to "some of our Negro citizens, directed and led in part by outsiders". This statement was aimed at King, the main "outsider".

On April 16 King replied in his "Letter from Birmingham Jail", a long letter since "what else can one do when he is alone in a narrow jail cell, other than write long letters, think long thoughts and pray long prayers?". Indeed, in prison there was at least time to take stock mentally, to analyse critically both his tactics and the general situation and to write this letter. There was time and there was a motive, too—a letter from a solitary prison cell carried more conviction than a "call" composed at home in a comfortable study.

This appeal to his opponents was by no means mild and prayerful: King couched it in terms of furious criticism. Replying to reproaches, he wrote: "We have waited for more than 340 years for our constitutional God-given rights. The na-

tions of Asia and Africa are moving with jet-like speed toward gaining political independence, but we still creep at horse-and-buggy pace toward gaining a cup of coffee at a lunch counter. Perhaps it is easy for those who have never felt the stinging darts of segregation to say, 'Wait'..."

And King swept on with the flow of an angry and rapid pen, with the single breath of a man who has won his unimpeachable truth at the price of suffering, who has been wounded by the haughty blindness of his "brothers in Christ", swept on in a scorching accusation, a pledge, an expression of pain by one easily wounded but accustomed to keep his heart in check:

"But when you have seen some vicious mobs lynch your mothers and fathers at will and drown your sisters and brothers at whim; when you have seen hate-filled policemen curse, kick and even kill your black brothers and sisters; when you see the vast majority of your twenty million Negro brothers smothering in an airtight cage of poverty in the midst of an affluent society; when you suddenly find your tongue twisted and your speech stammering as you seek to explain to your six-year-old daughter why she can't go to the public amusement park that has just been advertised on television, and see tears welling up in her eyes when she is told that Funtown is closed to colored children, and see ominous clouds of inferiority beginning to form in her little mental sky, and see her beginning to distort her personality by developing an unconscious bitterness toward white people; when you have to concoct an answer for a five-year-old son who is asking: 'Daddy, why do white

people treat colored people so mean?'; when you take a cross-country drive and find it necessary to sleep night after night in the uncomfortable corners of your automobile because no motel will accept you; when you are humiliated day in and day out by nagging signs reading 'white' and 'colored'; when your first name becomes 'nigger', your middle name becomes 'boy' (however old you are) and your last name becomes 'John', and your wife and mother are never given the respected title 'Mrs.'; when you are harried by day and haunted by night by the fact that you are a Negro, living constantly at tiptoe stance, never quite knowing what to expect next, and are plagued with inner fears and outer resentments; when you are forever fighting a degenerating sense of 'nobodiness'—then you will understand why we find it difficult to wait."

In this counter-attack King defended the right to disobey racist laws: "there are two types of laws: just and unjust... Any law that uplifts human personality is just. Any law that degrades human personality is unjust." He wrote of his disappointment with "the white church and its leadership". "Every day I meet young people whose disappointment with the church has turned into outright disgust" because it had not taken the side of the oppressed, he noted; young people who dismissed the church as "an irrelevant social club with no meaning for the twentieth century". He hailed clergymen who had broken the paralysing chains of conformism and become active partners in the struggle for freedom.

This apostle of non-violence was accused of extremism. In replying, he defended "creative extremism", excluding compliance with injustice

and oppression, an extremism expressed in the words of his namesake, the church reformer Martin Luther: "Here I stand; I cannot do otherwise, so help me God".

In this letter King's conviction fused with his anger, his adamant character with his bitterness, anxiety and apprehensions. The reproof delivered to him by the eight clergymen revealed a heavy truth: that his critics once again saw less evil in racism than in street marches. The Birmingham break-through was a break-through to conscience, to the minds of millions of Americans. Only the solidarity of the public could smash the racists. But as yet there was no solidarity. On the contrary, as King's opponents made clear, sympathy was with "Bull" Connor, observer of "law and order" in a city where "disorder" was caused by King and his followers. Moderate Americans usually place order above justice. In Birmingham they seemed not to see racism, cruelty and oppression. For them the line was drawn between blacks, who marched in violation of the law, and patient, even humane policemen, who kept their clubs and dogs in check and carried out their professional duty—arresting law-breakers and handing them over to justice.

The paradox—and it was a planned paradox, part and parcel of King's strategy—was that the success of non-violence was usually linked to violence from the other side, the violence of enemies, of racists. This broke down indifference, enabling a third, decisive force to enter the confrontation—the solidarity of the press, television, public opinion and, ultimately, the federal government with those struggling for equal rights.

When he was released on bail after eight days in prison, King insisted on involving young people in the marches. College students, high-school students and even elementary-school pupils enthusiastically mastered the simple secrets of "direct non-violent action" at unusual classes.

Now hundreds, not dozens, of triumphant demonstrators went to prison, singing songs of freedom. When an amazed policeman, bending over an eight-year-old girl clutching her mother's hand, asked her what she wanted, the child replied, lisping put nevertheless distinctly: "Freedom!"

Birmingham witnessed the unusual spectacle of bus loads—school-bus loads—of children being taken, not to school, but to prison: there were not enough prison vehicles. Many headmasters ordered their pupils not to participate in marches, but the children simply left their classes.

On May 2 the police were stretched to their limit. In the course of a single day more than 1,000 people, mostly young, were arrested and the police were obliged to drag this human mass, unresisting but uncompliant, into vans and buses.

An infuriated "Bull" Connor tore off his mask.

On May 3 a march was savagely dispersed and on May 4 historic photographs appeared in the American press.

Two maddened policemen swung their clubs at an elderly black woman lying on the asphalt. Stunned, black-skinned spectators gathered on the pavement while powerful young men stood in the road, their necks shaven, police badges on the breast pockets of ironed shirts, stainless-steel

handcuffs on wide belts and their right hands wound around with leashes at the end of which broad-chested German shepherd-dogs strained with impatience. Among these young men, his back to the camera, a black man in a straw hat stood, arms held out and legs apart as if performing a very difficult, very risky and by no means voluntary dance, his left trouser-leg torn from top to bottom exposing the tensed muscles of his leg and beside him, jaws open to show its white fangs, a dog on a leash reared on its hind legs, eager for partners in this dance, while another shepherd-dog was busy on the other side with the right trouser-leg and the right buttock. Three people stood by a wall as if condemned, shot with streams of water from a fire-hose. The black woman on the left seemed to want to push herself into the wall, to immure herself—in this there would be salvation—while on the right a young man was protecting his face with his hand. The third person had inclined his head prayerfully beneath the merciless volleys of water and his wet clothes clung in sculptural folds to his skin.

In the Birmingham version of Charcot's water treatment not only fire-hoses were used: hoses from coal-mines were also brought into play, tearing the skin and breaking ribs and capable of ripping the bark from trees.

In our age more credence is given to the testimony of the cine-camera and the photographic lense than to a cry from the heart, especially since not every cry will be heard and not every heart can express itself. Reporters helped the black citizens of Birmingham. The brutal immediacy of their photographs shook America.

They answered those who counselled against haste better than King could. "Bull Connor's police dogs accused the conscience of white America in terms which could no longer be ignored," the American historian Arthur Schlesinger later noted.

Thus "creative tension" was created.

The blacks did not retreat. The next day they came on to the street, knowing that the "non-violence" of the police was over and that they would again be met by dogs, clubs and hoses. But this was, as King rightly said, "our finest hour". It was during this hour that the Birmingham bell rang out its message of alarm.

The Birmingham police and their chief became frenzied. Savage reprisals taken against peaceful people, against adolescents and children spilled out of Alabama day after day on to the television screens and into the newspapers of the United States and the entire world. The focal point of peaceful confrontation was now the scene of swinging clubs, the thunder of policemen's feet as they pursued blacks and the hiss of devastating streams of water. The prediction of a racist that blood would flow in the streets of Birmingham before desegregation came had already become fact. An expressive element in this picture was formed by the contrast between black adolescents demanding freedom and powerful, well-fed dogs released from their leashes!

Americans could only justify themselves by statements that this was the deep South, which lived according to savage rules rejected by the civilised North. The world was uninterested in such niceties: it was horrified by the face of racist America on display in Birmingham.

During those climactic days more than 2,500 blacks were thrown in prison. "Fill the jails!"—and the jails of Birmingham were so jammed that the police ceased making mass arrests.

President Kennedy sent Burke Marshall, chief civil-rights assistant of the Attorney-General, to Birmingham. Once again, the president avoided a clash between the federal government and the local authorities. While expressing his concern, he simultaneously stressed the absence of constitutional prerogatives that would have justified his direct intervention. He chose a roundabout path in his search for a compromise, giving Burke Marshall the task of organising talks between black leaders and white big businessmen, the real masters of Birmingham. The president also instructed Robert McNamara, the defence secretary, and Douglas Dillon, the secretary of the treasury, both of whom were former businessmen, to make contacts with the leaders of big business with the aim of persuading them to exercise their influence on the Birmingham businessmen. The most influential of the major national corporations in Birmingham was United States Steel, but its president, Roger Blough, refused to help the cause of desegregation. In the interests of truth, it should be added that the United Steel Workers, too, did not lift a finger; its reactionary leadership practised discrimination against blacks and many of its rank-and-file members were infected with racist attitudes.

Secret talks were conducted between black leaders and the white Senior Citizens Committee in parallel with the marches. The blacks put forward four demands: 1) desegregation of snack-bars, public conveniences, fitting rooms

and drinking fountains in shops; 2) non-discriminatory promotion and the hire of blacks by Birmingham's shops and industrial enterprises; 3) the dropping of charges against imprisoned demonstrators; 4) establishment of an inter-racial committee to draw up a timetable for desegregation in other areas of Birmingham's life.

But police repression did not cease. The campaign organisers could no longer control the anger of the blacks and the non-violent were joined in the struggle by unorganised blacks, who had lost faith in non-violence and used the counter-arguments of bricks and empty bottles against the police. The savagery intensified.

Once the shattering stream of water from a fire-hose threw Fred Shuttlesworth against the wall of a house and he was taken to hospital in an ambulance.

"I would like to see him taken away in a hearse," commented "Bull" Connor.

The relentless boycott of segregated trading premises continued, groups of blacks picketing the doors of shops. The city was, in any case, not in a buying mood: even white citizens preferred to avoid the epicentre of racial disorder, the clubs and dogs of the police and the embittered blacks. The repression dramatised the struggle, but in practical terms boycott participants were, perhaps, helped most of all by the dollar. Shopkeepers suffered heavy losses. According to their calculations, department-store sales during the four weeks of marches and boycotts fell by 10 per cent as compared to the same period in the previous year. The realists became convinced that, from the commercial point of view, police repression did not pay and would

not ensure the former flow of dollars into cash-registers and bank safes. This circumstance compelled businessmen—the "city fathers"—to treat their talks with the blacks more seriously. On May 10 the two sides came to a four-point agreement. Point 1: desegregation within three months. Point 2: improvement within two months. Point 3: a promise of official help in freeing those who had been imprisoned. Point 4: establishment within two weeks of a body for interracial co-operation.

Victory! Or was it?

Late in the evening of Saturday, May 11, two bombs were thrown from a car at the home of Alfred Daniel King, a Birmingham clergyman and Martin Luther King's younger brother. The bombs demolished the façade, but the pastor, his wife and five children escaped unhurt. A few minutes later another bomb, believed to have been thrown from the same mysterious car (the criminals were never caught), exploded at the Gaston Motel. It was aimed at Room No. 30, in which King and Abernathy were living, but by chance—it was a lucky Saturday night for the King brothers!—both men were with their families in Atlanta.

Victory?

The bombs were thrown soon after a large Ku Klux Klan meeting in Bessemer, an industrial township on the south-western outskirts of Birmingham. The meeting was attended by the imperial wizard, the head of the Klan, two grand dragons, 200 rank-and-file "Klansmen" in Klan robes and approximately 1,000 "sympathisers". Two eight-metre crosses burnt, crackling in the uneasy night. The sparks flew into the air and

the smell of burning cut through the scent of flowering magnolias. Sparks flew, too, when bombs were thrown a few hours later at the home of A. D. King and at the Gaston Motel.

The businessmen who had reached agreement with the blacks were accused of treachery by the Klan. The Birmingham authorities, too, failed to support the agreement and Governor George Wallace bluntly declared that he would not be party to "compromise" over segregation.

Burke Marshall and his superior, Robert Kennedy, were publicly abused.

"I hope that every drop of blood that is spilled he (Robert Kennedy—*Ed.*) tastes in his throat, and I hope that he chokes on it," Arthur Hanes, the mayor of Birmingham, stated as he left office.

The bombs exploded on a Saturday evening, when the streets of the black neighbourhoods were filled with people and the bars were still open. Police sent to the Gaston Motel and the home of A. D. King were met by a hail of bricks. Wyatt Walker, King's assistant, had noticed suspicious-looking cars carrying whites circling the motel even before night fell and had asked for protection. At 7.30 in the evening an unknown caller had stated that the motel would be blown up that night. The police ignored the warnings. Now Wyatt Walker stood by a half-metre-wide hole in the wall and tried to persuade a crowd of aroused blacks to disperse.

"Return to your homes! For heaven's sake, don't lose your heads!" he shouted, barely maintaining his self-possession (his wife had been struck on the head by a police carbine with such force that she had had to be carried out).

"Tell that to 'Bull' Connor! This is what non-violence leads to!" came the answer from the furious crowd.

The trigger-happy highway patrolmen of Colonel Lingo, a man to whom the fame of Commissioner Connor gave no rest, drove up with fixed bayonets and sub-machine guns at the ready. Blows from gun butts and fists were scattered indiscriminately. After dispersing the blacks who had gathered near the motel, the patrolmen moved along the streets, settling accounts with every black they met. The shops of white grocers had already been set ablaze in response and the white firemen fighting the flames were met with bricks and bottles. On the edge of the ghetto white youths hurled stones at ambulances from negro hospitals speeding to the sites of explosions and clashes. "Order" was re-established by police and volunteers from the black "civil defence" with great difficulty only at 4 o'clock the following morning. Fifty injured men and women were in hospital.

That was how the night after the day of victory passed.

It also spoiled the spring weekend of the brothers in the White House. This time the president was forced to intervene in the critical situation. On the evening of May 12 he ordered dispatch of 3,000 regular troops at bases in the Birmingham area and announced that, if necessary, he would mobilise the Alabama national guard, thus placing it under his command. Regular detachments, including a special battalion trained in counter-insurgency were air-lifted into the Birmingham area. Ralph McGill, the liberal publisher of the *Atlanta Constitution,* was one of the

first to perceive an analogy which was very widely drawn in later years. Tension in Birmingham, he noted, was as real as in Vietnam.

The president's precautionary measures and warnings drew criticism from both sides. The blacks considered them insufficient, while the racists regarded them as an inadmissable encroachment upon their monopoly right to establish "order". However, the measures helped and from Monday Birmingham was "as quiet as a mouse", as one newspaper put it. The White House declared that it would not permit the agreement to be sabotaged. King and Abernathy returned hurriedly from Atlanta and walked through the ghetto, calling on the blacks for calm.

On May 23 the Alabama supreme court dismissed Birmingham's Commissioner of Public Safety, Eugene "Bull" Connor, In this sense victory was incontestable.

Under fire from both sides, the Kennedy brothers found themselves in an unenviable position and sought to extricate themselves from it by indulging both the innocent and the guilty and placing them in the same category. The president was, of course, restricted by the constitution, which gave extensive rights to the Birmingham and Alabama authorities. For example, he could not interfere in the actions of the Birmingham police or curb "Bull" Connor: the police were subordinate to the city authorities. His only weapons against Governor Wallace were regular federal troops or, in the event of an emergency, mobilisation of the national guard. He resorted to these measures with extreme reluctance, preferring more circuitous methods—such as sending Burke Marshall to Birmingham.

In fact, the Kennedy brothers were wavering between the principles expressed in their own promises of desegregation and civil rights and the game of political machination, in which US bourgeois figures see nothing shameful and which dictates the real and often cynical calculation of the gain or loss to be made from any particular step. John Kennedy dreamed of a second term in the White House. He needed votes and although eighteen months remained until the next presidential elections he always took this into account in his actions. On the one hand, black votes could be won—but these were few. On the other hand, if the president embittered the racists he would lose white votes in the South—and in the North, too, where Americans infected with racist psychology considered the blacks were in too much of a hurry and should not be indulged. Where, then, would he gain and where would he lose? Opinion polls gave the president little encouragement to take a firm stand on civil rights.

However, as the blacks' struggle intensified commitment became increasingly difficult to avoid. Considerations of "civil peace" in the country, its prestige abroad and, finally, the constitutional rights of Americans demanded a solution to the problem of desegregation. By declining to fulfil his pre-election promises the president was increasingly disillusioning blacks and liberal white Americans. Calls for a little more patience evoked the reverse reaction of impatience and protest.

On May 14 I attended a large meeting in the heart of Harlem on the corner of Seventh Avenue and 125th Street. Rain poured down, like

water from "Bull" Connor's fire-hoses, as if testing those at the meeting. They stood their ground. The speakers attacked official Washington as well as the racists. "Freedom now! No to Kennedy!" cried one pamphlet, and both calls found support. A. D. King, who had flown specially from Birmingham received a warm welcome, but cries broke out after his speech: "We want Malcolm! We want Malcolm!" Malcolm X had criticised the methods of non-violence and the shouts from the crowd were evidence of the popularity of his unyielding position.

In particular, the chasm of misunderstanding between black intellectuals and the government had widened, although the latter valued the former's support. Black intellectuals accused the Kennedy brothers of playing politics and of taking a soft line with racism.

In May, when events were at their height, Robert Kennedy arrived in New York and invited a group of well-known blacks to his apartment, including the writer James Baldwin, then at the peak of his fame and influence, the sociologist Kenneth Clark and the singer Harry Belafonte. The president's brother wanted to build bridges of agreement and understanding, but nothing came of the meeting.

The encounter was described by the historian Arthur Schlesinger, a close friend of the Kennedy family and a special adviser to the president, in his book *A Thousand Days: John F. Kennedy in the White House.*

"In the Negro group was also Jerome Smith, a young freedom rider who had recently been savagely beaten in the South," Schlesinger wrote. "Smith opened the meeting by saying, as the

Attorney General understood it, that being in the same room with Robert Kennedy made him feel like vomiting. What Smith was apparently trying to say was that he felt like vomiting to have to plead before the Attorney General for the rights to which he was entitled as an American. but it came through to Kennedy, who had been fighting hard himself for these rights, as a gratuitous expression of personal contempt. The Attorney General showed his resentment; the group rallied around the freedom rider; and from this already low point the conversation went rapidly down hill.

"Jerome Smith added that, so long as Negroes were treated this way, he felt no moral obligation to fight for the United States in war. The group applauded this sentiment. Some spoke of sending arms into the South. Baldwin said that the only reason the government had put federal troops in Alabama was because a white man had been stabbed. Burke Marshall, who was present, said that he had consulted with Dr. King about the use of federal troops; the group laughed at him."

They spoke different languages, these two: the energetic, well-groomed son of a Boston multimillionaire, appointed Attorney-General at the age of 35 by his brother, the president, and the young black who had been viciously beaten by racists. David Baldwin, James Baldwin's hot-blooded brother, who was also present at the meeting, shook his fist under Robert Kennedy's nose and accused him of failing to understand the moral acuteness of the problem.

What dramatic irony there was in that confrontation in a fashionable apartment on the

southern edge of Central Park, beyond the northern side of which Harlem began! Within six months the brother of the Bostonian would be killed and within five years he himself would collapse to the floor of a Los Angeles hotel at precisely the moment when he had begun to speak out on the subject of America's problems and was trying to reach the White House with the help of the deprived blacks and the other pariahs of his country.

But on that May day in 1963 Robert Kennedy was struck by this open hostility. The two sides were far removed from each other and looked at their country with very different eyes.

Nevertheless, the lessons of Birmingham inclined President Kennedy towards a firmer position. He believed that the sight of dogs savaging women and teenagers had prepared Americans for decisive governmental steps towards desegregation. He once observed to King with his habitual irony that the "civil rights movement owes 'Bull' Connor as much as it owes Abraham Lincoln". To judge by this joke, which is not without justification, he did not feel himself to be Lincoln. But John Kennedy was, to some degree, at least, better than his predecessor, Dwight Eisenhower, who had been indifferent to the struggle for equal rights.

On June 13 John Kennedy addressed the nation on television. "A great change is at hand," he said, "and our task, our obligation, is to make that revolution, that change, peaceful and constructive for all."

Change?

That same evening Medgar Evers, a Mississippi black leader, was killed at the door of his

house in Jackson. The shot was a warning that the racists were more ready for armed struggle than for peaceful change.

On June 19 the president sent the most important draft law of his thousand days in the White House to congress. The law provided for wide-scale desegregation and for measures against racial discrimination in hiring blacks and also laid down the means of ensuring that these measures were implemented.

On June 22 a group of black leaders was invited by John Kennedy to the White House. They were more polite and restrained in talking to the president than the black writers and artists had been with his brother. The forthcoming march on Washington was discussed. The president was apprehensive that a mass march would strengthen resistance in congress to the law he had proposed, but his attempts to persuade those present at the meeting "to clear Negroes from the streets" failed. King recalled Robert Kennedy's request in April to postpone the Birmingham campaign and told the president: "... Take the question of the march on Washington ... It may seem ill-timed. Frankly, I have never engaged in any direct action movement which did not seem ill-timed ..."

King came to the meeting as a man who had proved the rightness of his cause in spite of bitter enemies and sceptical, unstable allies—as a victor. "To say that Martin Luther King won the Battle of Birmingham is no more an exaggeration than to say that George Washington won the Battle of Yorktown, or Nelson the Battle of Trafalgar," wrote William Miller in his book on King. "The event was decisive and sym-

bolic. Yet like Washington and Nelson, King was both more and less than the victor in a battle. For there were many leaders, many skirmishes and forays, campaigns major and minor on many fronts at once. He was not in charge of it all, but he had acted pivotally and seminally to foster it all. To tens of millions of people outside the freedom movement, he was the indelible symbol . . ."

The freedom bell which had been struck in Birmingham rang loudly throughout the summer. Over four months 841 demonstrations for equal rights were held in 196 cities in 35 states. That was a summer the authorities in the southern states would not forget: in the course of it they arrested a total of 14,000 people. At least a million Americans, black and white, took part in marches of solidarity, mainly in the North. But numbers were not the most important factor in these demonstrations: they were no longer brief, isolated clashes with racism, but a national movement embracing the entire country and gathering strength, speed and invincibility.

The "March on Washington", which went into history as the largest-ever demonstration in the streets of the US capital, took place on August 28, at the end of that memorable summer. From early morning thousands of people poured into Washington by road, came by rail to Union Station or landed at National, Dulles and Baltimore Airports. A column of Brooklyn blacks arrived in the capital on foot. There were special "freedom trains". Thousands of "freedom buses" arrived from the South and the North. The marchers included blacks and whites, students and grey-haired old men, veteran freedom riders and

150 congressmen, Mississippi sharecroppers and Dearborn assembly-line workers, professors from Harvard and film stars from Hollywood. There were hundreds and perhaps thousands of clergymen, renowned folk-singers, writers, scholars and trade-union leaders.

In columns and singly they moved towards the Washington monument, a granite needle almost 200 metres high. The early morning, before the August sun had begun to blaze down, was chill, but they were warm because they were a multitude, because their numbers were growing, because there were more of them than ever before. By midday 250,000 people had gathered. Solemnly, unhurriedly, following the instructions of their marshals, this endless mass of people flowed towards the 36 Doric columns of the Lincoln memorial, beneath the roof of which the ungainly, powerful form of the "great emancipator" is frozen in marble.

The year marked the 100th anniversary of the publication of Lincoln's famous Emancipation Proclamation and black strugglers and their allies had come to remind the country and its 35th president that they were still not free and that they had nothing to celebrate as long as clubs, dogs and fire-hoses barred their way even to a lunch-counter.

The flood of humanity into Washington was the result of months of hard work. The idea of the march had temporarily united six of the best-known civil-rights organisations, from the extremely moderate Urban Coalition to the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC). At the final stage the leaders of protestant, catholic and Jewish organisations and the United

Auto Workers headed by Walter Reuter also served as principal organisers of the march. However, yet another shameful page in history was written by the reactionaries of the AFL-CIO Central Labour Council, who refused to support the march.

The "big ten" organisers ensured the mass character of the march and at the same time predetermined its political heterogeneousness. On August 28 they came together in Washington and surprised America by their impressive size, but what would happen the next day, when they dispersed? Would the infusion of unity last for long? All proclaimed the slogan of equality, but what did they understand by it and what sacrifices were they prepared to make to achieve it? What, for example, was there in common between John Lewis of the SNCC, who had been thrown into prison 22 times, beaten up by Southern racists and whose survival until August 28, 1963, at all was a miracle, and the Roman Catholic archbishop Patrick O'Boyle, who was marching for the first time in his fortunate existence? When he read the text of Lewis's speech the archbishop threatened publicly to boycott the march if controversial remarks addressed to John Kennedy were not removed. In the interests of unity John Lewis was persuaded to moderate his text.

Official Washington came to a frightened halt. Civil servants were sent home and shops and restaurants closed. Troops based around Washington as well as the police were placed on alert. However, the organisers of the march damped down militancy and stressed discipline and order. The march was watched by hundreds of

journalists and television cameramen; the marchers wanted to show tens of millions of white Americans that the notion of the black as an irresponsible person was profoundly mistaken. Washington's police chief Robert Murray admitted that, in 36 years on the force, he had never seen a more disciplined and enthusiastic gathering.

The meeting before the Lincoln memorial was chaired by Philip Randolph, a veteran of the movement and president of the black Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters trade union. In his speech he made the same point as John Lewis, although in somewhat more moderate language: "...the plain and simple fact is that until we went into the streets the Federal Government was indifferent to our demands."

King was the last and most honoured speaker. As he waited to speak he looked tired from the tense preceding months and from the sleepless night he had just passed: he had worked on his speech until 4 am in his Washington hotel room.

What did he think of as he stood among the march leaders on the broad steps of the Lincoln memorial, looking out at the sea of people filling the entire square and the banks of the rectangular pool reflecting Washington's granite needle? What did he think of as he looked at this needle and the dome of the Capitol soaring above it in the hot August sky, topped by the figure of an Indian, representative of a people which had been reduced physically and politically to nothing only then to be raised as a beautiful and meaningless symbol over a building embodying the sovereignty of the people? Did he recall that he had climbed those steps to the

marble figure of the "emancipator" not many years before as a dark-skinned boy clutching his father's hand and reflect that now he was there as the recognised and most distinguished leader of an unprecedented army, banners raised with a message like a pass-word: "Work and Freedom"? Did he think of the file, now no longer a secret, outlining Project Confrontation and of the first 250 volunteers, who had been found with such difficulty and who were surely the forerunners of this great march? Or of "Bull" Connor—after all, there had been a moment of personal confrontation? Perhaps he thought of the eight long days in prison, of the long prison thoughts and the long letter to the clergymen who had condemned him and praised the Birmingham police? He had convinced many of them and now he could see hundreds of clergymen among the marchers. Perhaps his thoughts turned to the difficult days ahead? Even at that moment of concord, inspiration and recognition of the movement's strength, he did not forget that the road ahead had not become smoother: this morning's meeting in Congress had brought the leaders of the march back to earth, for they had been told the prospects for passing the civil-rights bill were not brilliant.

I do not know what he thought of, but when his turn to speak came, he spoke of a dream. Before a quarter of a million people he spoke of his dream as one speaks in a burst of rare confidence, among truly close and dear people, when one knows that not a single word or feeling will be in vain but will evoke the desired flow of unity and brotherhood in response. However, Martin Luther King had the great soul of a

struggler and a poet, revealed to intimates and to the millions alike. And he had a great dream.

"I have a dream that one day on the red hills of Georgia sons of former slaves and the sons of former slave-owners will be able to sit down together at the table of brotherhood. I have a dream that one day even the state of Mississippi, a state sweltering with the heat of injustice, sweltering with the heat of oppression, will be transformed into an oasis of freedom and justice.

"I have a dream that my four little children will one day live in a nation where they will not be judged by the color of their skin but by the content of their character.

"I have a dream that one day every valley shall be exalted, every hill and mountain shall be made low. The rough places will be made plain, and the crooked places will be made straight. This is the faith that I go back to the South with. With this faith we will be able to hew out of the mountain of despair a stone of hope. With this faith we will be able to work together, to pray together, to struggle together, knowing we will be free one day . . .

". . . When we allow freedom to ring—when we let it ring from every city and every hamlet, from every state and every city, we will be able to speed up that day when all of God's children, black men and white men, Jews and Gentiles, Protestants and Catholics, will be able to join hands and sing in the words of old Negro spiritual, 'Free at last, Free at last, Great God a-mighty, We are free at last'."

The dream was a splendid one, inexpressibly splendid, and after beginning his speech in measured and calm tones, conscious that he was

now speaking not just to the sympathetic human sea before him but also to television viewers who would be repelled rather than conquered by emotion, King was fired with passion and pain, by the African temperament of his forebears and spoke faster, as if hastening his dream, as if breathless at its inexpressible beauty. From the crowd blacks cried "Dream on! Dream on!" in ecstasy.

This was his greatest speech and his greatest day. After he was shot in Memphis writers and journalists placed him in history as a man who had had a dream. "I have a dream"—those words headed obituaries and formed the title of photographic albums and records that appeared with lightning speed after the Memphis assassination—contradictory signs of respect for King and of the posthumous commercialisation of this respect and love. The last words of his famous speech were carved on the white gravestone in Atlanta's Southern View Cemetery for blacks: "Free at last, Free at last, Great God a-mighty, I am free at last!".

But then, after that great day in his life, after the march organisers had visited the White House where, in the presence of the US president, Philip Randolph called the 34-year-old black from Atlanta "the moral leader of the nation", King returned to the South with the belief that "the rough places will be made plain and the crooked places... straight", that the night of racism would give way before the morning of brotherhood. Eighteen days after the Birmingham march, on the beautiful, sunny morning of September 15, the racists of Birmingham bombed a black Sunday school and killed four

little black girls. Birmingham had stood on blood since its very first days, when it had been born as a small mining settlement, but even its history had never known such a crime. And, as if this was not enough, as if concentrating the terrorist blows, a white policeman killed another black child on that same bloody Sunday and a gang of white hooligans killed a black teenager peacefully riding his bicycle. Six innocent children . . .

The murderers did not choose targets, they wreaked vengeance on an entire race. "Segregation now, segregation tomorrow, segregation forever"—by their actions in Birmingham the murderers had affirmed Governor George Wallace's triple oath, striking out King's thrice proclaimed dream of "freedom at last".

Those murdered in Birmingham were buried by honest Americans in various states of the North and the South. In New York an official day of mourning was declared and the inaction of the federal authorities was again condemned at a meeting. In a gesture which was well-intentioned yet which seemed a sour joke, Mayor Wagner renamed Times Square Equal Opportunities Square for a day. Thousands of people took part in a demonstration of mourning in Washington. In Birmingham a solemn funeral took place on September 18. Not a single representative of the municipal authorities attended and there were no expressions of official condolence; apart from a few brave clergymen no white citizens were present.

"More than children were buried that day," King noted, "honor and decency were also interred."

Many wanted to commit his dream to the ground, too. The dream remained elusive.

The successes of the past summer were followed by a return of sobriety in autumn. The May agreement won with such difficulty by the blacks was broken and concessions in the area of desegregation were trifling and unstable.

White Birmingham continued to demonstrate its traditional united front of hatred and fear. Honest white citizens were still afraid openly to condemn racism. As usual, FBI agents sent from Washington failed to discover racist murderers: during the eighteen years since the war black churches and homes had been bombed fifty times, but the criminals had never once been caught and punished. Governor Wallace took advantage of the Sunday killings to bring Colonel Lingo's patrolmen into Birmingham. Under the pretext of preventing uprisings, they occupied the black districts, drove the inhabitants into their houses and established a reign of terror.

"You can achieve order by frightening everyone, but that will not make your order legitimate . . . Birmingham is not simply a dying city, it is dead." Those words were flung publicly at the racists by Charles Morgan, a young white lawyer and citizen of Birmingham, who dared to express his feelings of shame, sorrow and protest. He paid for his courageous challenge to the cruel norms of white solidarity: his clients abandoned him and lawyer Morgan was forced to leave Birmingham.

On November 22 the most important shots of a year filled with victims rang out, cutting down President John Kennedy.

The general atmosphere of violence and intolerance in the country was intensified by the bitter racial conflicts of that year. Even the half-hearted measures taken by President Kennedy in defense of civil rights had won him the deadly reputation of being a negro sympathiser. After the racial tensions of the spring, summer and autumn of 1963 his popularity fell sharply. A November Gallup poll showed that only 59 per cent of Americans approved of the policies of the Kennedy administration. A Louis Harris poll in autumn recorded an even more characteristic phenomenon: approximately 4.5 million white Americans who had voted for Kennedy in 1960 now wanted to vote against him. Had elections been held in the autumn of 1963 President Kennedy would probably have lost—a by no means superfluous comment on the sentimental posthumous myth of the "beloved president". A curious phenomenon was unearthed by Samuel Lubell in the course of a poll of white, predominantly working-class suburbs in Birmingham. In 1960 Kennedy had gained a majority of votes in these districts, but in the autumn of 1963 only one person among those polled was prepared to give him his vote.

In short, when mass marches and protests by blacks disturbed the hornets' nest of racism the numbers as well as the viciousness and, alas, the variety of its inhabitants were revealed.

"While the question 'who killed President Kennedy?' is important, the question 'what killed him?' is more important," King emphasised. "Our late President was assassinated by a morally inclement climate . . .

". . .President Kennedy has something impor-

.tant to say to each of us in his death. He has something to say to every politician who has fed his constituents the stale bread of racism and the spoiled meat of hatred. He has something to say to every clergyman who has observed racial evils and remained silent behind the safe security of stained-glass windows . . .

". . .He says to all of us that this virus of hate that has seeped into the veins of our nation, if unchecked, will lead inevitably to our moral and spiritual doom."

In her memoirs King's widow, Coretta, recalls the day of the Dallas assault and the first reports that the president had been wounded. She and Martin sat by the television set, waiting for more news and praying for the life of John Kennedy. When the death of the president was announced, King remained silent for some time. Then he said: "This is what is going to happen to me also. I keep telling you, this is a sick society."

"I was not able to say anything," Coretta writes. "I had no word to comfort my husband. I could not say, 'It won't happen to you'. I felt he was right. It was a painfully agonising silence. I moved closer to him and gripped his hand in mine."

The paths of John Kennedy and Martin Luther King crossed more than once during their lives, both physically and politically. There is no point in guessing which of them will find a place in the pantheon of great Americans: history moves slowly and capriciously and the direction in which it is pointing is still hidden by the stormy events of the present day. The two men were opponents more often than they were allies,

although an uneasy form of co-operation grew up between them in the last year of the president's life that could scarcely have been durable: after all, in Kennedy's opinion the blacks were demanding too much and too fast, while in King's opinion Kennedy was doing too little and acting too slowly and indecisively. Both men loved their country, but they had different views and different public affairs at heart.

They were different people: the tireless fighter for justice and equality who exposed the economic and social evils of America and its imperialistic structure itself, and the bourgeois politician who broadened his understanding of the realities of US internal life and the place of these realities in the world of the second half of the 20th century, the enlightened servant of the ruling class.

Both were killed and, although it would have been absurd during their lifetimes to weigh their chances of a violent death, only one of them was a hero, knowing what lay ahead and placing himself under an obligation devotedly to serve an ideal in his life, while the other jokingly speculated on what he would do after he had served his term in the White House and become a former president—too young to write his memoirs and too old to take up another career.

As the spokesman of deprived America, indeed, simply as a sober man who loved the truth, Martin Luther King did not subscribe to the posthumous myth surrounding John Kennedy. A martyr? Yes. A hero? No.

Shortly before his death, when the problems that remained loomed in all their immensity in King's eyes and all illusions were gone, he as-

sessed the merits of Kennedy and Johnson in the struggle for equality with a critical eye. Virtually no president had done much for black Americans, he wrote in an article that appeared after his death, although the last two had received "much undeserved credit for helping us. This credit has accrued to Lyndon Johnson and John Kennedy only because it was during their Administrations that negroes began doing more for themselves". Kennedy, like Johnson, had been unwilling to agree to a civil-rights law and both had earlier told the blacks that such a law was an impossibility.

King's words were justified. Like his fellow strugglers, he did not want official America to take the credit for the advances which had been won by the masses of black Americans at the cost of stubborn struggle, sacrifice and blood.

After the funeral of John Kennedy, when the nation was still in a state of shock, President Johnson announced in his first speech to the US congress that the best memorial to the slain president would be the immediate adoption of the civil-rights act Kennedy had sent to Capitol Hill at the height of the events in Birmingham. The congressmen applauded for a long time. But feelings of grief are short-lived, while prejudices die hard. The draft bill became bogged down in congress.

The November days of grief passed. December came to an end and the 1963 civil-rights act was renamed the 1964 act, but the legislation remained stalled. Despite the urging of the White House, congress dragged its feet. Spring came. Southern racists in the senate blocked the passage of the law by means of a filibuster. The nineteen

senators who took part in the filibuster stood in the way of a cause supported by 20 million people.

In the middle of May I went to Washington to look at the descendants of the 17th-century West Indies pirates. Another of their predecessors was the adventurer William Walker, a lawyer by training and later a filibusterer by calling, who colonised Nicaragua with a handful of underlings, became president of the republic and in 1860 was put before a firing squad in Honduras. (Incidentally, congressional information leaflets made it clear that senatorial filibusterers sought more noble predecessors for themselves in the person of the Roman senator Cato, who had bottled up legislation proposed by Caesar himself.)

The eleventh week of the filibuster was dragging on when we arrived at Capitol Hill and joined our fellow-journalists on the round press-gallery stools. In the visitors' gallery we could see adults and children, singly and in groups, whites and dozens of blacks. Craning their necks and holding their breath—deference itself—they looked down at the rectangular chamber, the floor of which was covered wtih a discreetly-coloured, soft carpet. Dark-red tables, the size of school desks, formed a gently sloping amphitheatre: one hundred tables, one for every senator. Light, carved doors yielded smoothly to the hands of the initiated, who did not look at the members of the public hanging over the gallery: practised actor-politicians, they were instinctively aware of their audience.

The chamber was almost empty. I counted only seven members of the upper house present. A senator from the state of Virginia was speaking: a respectable, grey-haired man, unemphatically ges-

ticulating, a thick stack of papers on his table. Was this a filibusterer? He looked more like an absent-minded scholar, but appearances are deceptive. The senator muttered something under his breath so quietly that only the trained ear of the stenographer, tapping professionally at the keyboard of his miniature machine, could catch his words. Indeed, apart from the stenographer only the curious onlookers strained to hear the speaker. His colleagues sat at their tables writing, chatting with each other or exchanging jokes, turning their backs on Cicero in the calmest fashion possible. They were old hands. As for your author, he caught himself yawning involuntarily and uncontrollably within fifteen minutes, a yawn which, in the mischievous phrase of the poet, was "wider than the gulf of Mexico".

Meanwhile, the senator from Virginia had switched to a whisper: he had at least four hours' speaking ahead of him and was saving his vocal cords. This was the fiftieth day of the filibuster and everything was running as smoothly as the engine of a Chevrolet. When the first senator fell silent another would begin speaking without the slightest pause elapsing—that was the point of the entire exercise—having prepared a stock of reading matter of any kind, from the Old Testament to the latest issues of a frivolous magazine (the latter sources, incidentally, were not encouraged). What was read or talked about did not have the least importance. What was important was to kill time and with it the civil-rights law by delaying debate and thus a congressional vote.

The nineteen filibusterers were divided into

three groups. On Tuesdays and Fridays the group of Mississippi senator John Stennis talked from morning to evening. On Mondays and Thursdays the burden was borne by the six senators headed by Lister Hill of Alabama, while on Wednesdays and Saturdays the speakers were led by Louisiana senator Allen Ellender. In the corridors of the senate camp-beds stood ready should all-night vigils be required.

During the two days I spent on Capitol Hill I heard a great deal. The Southern senators had colourful past histories and included a number of record-holders. James Eastland, an inveterate racist and a Mississippi planter hated by the blacks, was chairman of the senate Judiciary Committee, on which he had buried 120 of the 121 civil-rights laws that had passed through his hands. The star of Strom Thurmond had risen comparatively recently. In 1958 he had set an unsurpassed filibustering record by speaking for 24 hours 18 minutes without a break.

Thurmond did not want to talk to us, but his office presented us with several leaflets entitled "Strom Thurmond reports to the people". We learned from one report that, since communists support blacks, blacks are communists. In another Thurmond explained his opposition to a law on desegregation "because the rights of property are the soil on which all human rights flourish". In practical terms, the senator's concern for the rights of property-owner meant driving blacks from cafeterias, motels and swimming-pools—these were, after all, usually owned as a rule by whites.

This philosopher from South Carolina termed the filibuster an "educative debate". Did he per-

ceive the latent irony of this description? Habitués of the senate press-gallery would remember the 46th day of the filibuster. A young black in the visitors' gallery shouted at the entire chamber, which had been lulled by the filibusterers: "And these people are solving the questions of equal rights? It's monstrous! Shame!" Although he was immediately thrown out, he understood that these elected representatives of the people had taken upon themselves the task the police-dogs of Birmingham had failed to complete.

However, the filibusterers were fighting a rear-guard action. They were postponing the vote because the majority of the senate was not on their side. They were able to weaken and emasculate some of the provisions of the act, but the efforts of President Johnson and the Northern Democrats led by Hubert Humphrey "forced" the law through the senate, where it gained the necessary two-thirds majority. The law was also adopted by the house of representatives.

On July 2, 1964, five hours after the vote in the house of representatives, President Johnson signed the act in the White House, giving it the force of law. The ceremony was televised.

President Johnson explained the purpose of the law as being to state "that those who are equal before God shall now also be equal in the polling booths, in the classrooms, in the factories and in hotels and restaurants, and movie theatres, and other places that provide service to the public". Johnson had the look of a conqueror and exuded energy, optimism and good humour. He contrived to sign the text of the law, a document comprising 49 letters and punctua-

marks, with 75 pens. The battery of pens that had been prepared was insufficient and an aide brought several dozen more. With regal familiarity Johnson tossed used pens to the senators and congressmen present at the ceremony, who gratefully caught them. Lyndon Johnson gave a Texan dimension to the long-standing presidential custom of presenting souvenir pens during the signing of a law to those who had been instrumental in its adoption. The civil-rights act was the most important he signed at the White House.

Black leaders were also invited to the ceremony. Dr King stood behind the president as he dexterously inscribed each half-letter before aiming a fresh pen at one of the senators around him. Johnson and King congratulated each other and Johnson presented King with a souvenir pen.

"This will remain among my most cherished possessions," King said. And added: "I really should have got a bunch." His comment was not immodest.

Standing before everyone in the office of the president of the United States amid a crowd of congressmen and cabinet members, King was pleased that the civil-rights law had been signed at last. He considered it important, although not a panacea. But he knew to what and to whom this signing ceremony was owed: to semi-conspiratorial conferences at night in Room No. 30 of the Gaston Motel, to adolescents who had not been afraid of dogs and fire-hoses, to Ezell Blair and Joseph McNeill, two black students from Greensboro, North Carolina, who had staged the country's first sit-in on February 1, 1960, at the segregated lunch-counter of Woolworth's, to the

dozens and then hundreds and thousands of brave people who had followed their example, to James Meredith, who had entered the "lily-white" University of Mississippi—Ole Miss—despite mortal danger, to Medgar Evers, murdered in Jackson, to the brave youngsters in Greenwood who had been hunted with pistols and chains when they had tried to register black electors . . .

The road to this law, which now declared segregation of public places illegal in every part of the United States, led directly through the hard-fought campaign for the right to drink a cup of coffee and eat a hot-dog at the lunch-counters of Birmingham.

The road was paved with victims and at the final ceremony a dark shadow was thrown over the festive, energetic president and the smiling, cheerful congressmen, basking in the rays of television publicity, by the latest, still undiscovered but heinous—everyone understood that—act of the racists. There were three victims, the oldest of whom was 24. Michael Schwerner and Andrew Goodman, two white Americans, had come to Mississippi from New York to devote their summer holidays to the cause of racial equality. They had made friends with James Chaney, a local black, and in a remote Mississippi district had taught the blacks to free themselves from the oppressive fear of whites. In justice they, too, should have been among the recipients of those 75 souvenir pens. But two weeks before the White House ceremony they had been arrested in the small Mississippi town of Philadelphia by deputy sheriff Cecil Price, held until nightfall and then released into the stifling, cicada-filled Southern

darkness. The cicadas were not alone in their wakefulness that night. The three young men disappeared without trace and when, three days later, their burnt-out car was found near a deserted swamp, all America realised that they would never be seen again.

The latest storm of indignation exploded—I am not afraid of the dreary word "latest", for it is accurate—and Washington dispatched FBI agents, knowing that the local authorities would on no account bring the criminals to justice. Navy personnel dragged the local river in the hope of discovering corpses, newspapers thundered, as they always do—and all this brought the solemn moment of signing the civil-rights act into law a few days closer. (The corpses of the three men were not found until the beginning of August, buried deep in the red clay of a dyke around a cattle pond. They had been shot and Chaney, the black, had also been mutilated. The murderers were arrested by FBI agents only in December. They included deputy sheriff Cecil Price as well as his chief, Lawrence Rainey.)

Now Johnson and Humphrey had received their laurels. For King and the other strugglers for equality, a new battle, not without risk, lay ahead to put the law into practice. Segregation had been abolished, but racists and racism had not disappeared. In the South, George Wallace, Mississippi governor Paul Johnson and their underlings were already declaring that they would not recognise the law, but would try to overthrow it through individual court cases and the resultant legal definitions. This challenge, too, would have to be accepted.

A new and thorny path lay ahead, but laurels

had also fallen to King's lot—substantial laurels. Honest America welcomed him as one of the initiators of a powerful constitutional blow against racism.

It was an election year and the racial problem, like attitudes towards escalation of the US war in Vietnam, was in the forefront of the electoral campaign. Reaction grouped itself under the banner of Arizona senator Barry Goldwater. At the Republican convention in San Francisco which nominated the haberdashery millionaire and reserve air-force general as the party's candidate for the US presidency, the civil-rights law was branded unconstitutional amid a savage roar of approval and denounced as an infringement on the sacred right of an American to dispose of his property. Goldwater was among the senators who had voted against this law. In Montgomery George Wallace left the governor's residence for a successful guest-appearance in the North, where the support he received at primaries in a number of states was wide enough to testify to a white "back-lash" among racist-minded members of the petty-bourgeoisie against the slogan of equal rights. When Goldwater was chosen as republican candidate, the Alabama governor gave him his votes and temporarily abandoned the idea of a third party.

From the White House the Democrat Johnson lured Americans with his slogans of a "great society" and a "war on want" and his promises not to extend the war in Vietnam and to conduct a sensible foreign policy. By comparison with Goldwater the Texan, by no means a sympathetic figure, looked like the embodiment of statesmanship crowned with the halo of the blacks'

defender. King preferred not to associate himself with either of the parties and in 1960 had voted for neither Kennedy nor Nixon. But in 1964 Goldwater was too dangerous. At the Democratic Convention in Atlantic City King, like a number of other leaders, endorsed Johnson's candidacy. In November Johnson received virtually every black vote, helping him to achieve victory by a huge margin. Although Goldwater was heavily defeated, he nevertheless received the votes of 27 million Americans. There were many voters who gave their mandate to this man, at best a slightly disguised racist who would have been "happy" to trigger a nuclear conflict.

The autumn of 1964 was a memorable one for King. On October 14 he entered St. Joseph's Hospital in Atlanta for a check-up and a period of recuperation from the physical and nervous exhaustion of the previous months. The following day the telephone rang in his ward.

"Martin! Martin!" came the voice of a happy Coretta. "You have been awarded the Nobel Prize!"

The news was so unexpected and joyful that he did not immediately believe it. But it was true. He had been awarded the Nobel Peace Prize.

Martin Luther King was the second person from the American South to receive this high honour. The first had been William Faulkner, the renowned novelist, who had received the Nobel Prize in 1949. Humanism was the common factor linking the two Southerners—white and black, the heir of aristocrats and the grandson of a poor man, the sober realist who portrayed the complex world of the South and the passionate preach-

er who wanted to change that world. It was Faulkner who observed that "to live anywhere in the world today and be against equality because of race or color is like living in Alaska and being against snow".

Alas, he lived not in Alaska but in Oxford, Mississippi, on the campus of Ole Miss, the "lily-white" university which had never accepted a black student in its more than one hundred years of existence. Faulkner died in 1962, but it was not the death of the great writer that focused the attention of America and the world on Oxford, but the enrolment of a 29-year-old black called James Meredith at Ole Miss. During the night of September 30 hundreds of alumni of Ole Miss, sons of the "best families" in the South, stormed the university Lyceum led by a man who had arrived from Dallas in a broad-brimmed Texan hat—the fascist-minded retired general Edwin Walker. They wanted to tear the "nigger" apart together with those protecting him, but their arms proved too short and they withdrew from the field of nocturnal battle. This brutal crowd demonstrated that William Faulkner, the literary master of Ole Miss, could not convince all his pupils that the idea of racial equality was as natural as snow in Alaska.

Now a second Southerner had been awarded the Nobel Prize, a man for whom the meaning of life was to make the idea of equality natural for everyone. King, with his experience of struggle, had long since absorbed the advice Faulkner had given young writers in his Nobel Prize acceptance speech—to forget fear for ever. In nine years the Baptist pastor had been in prison thirty times. When he went to Oslo to re-

... the Nobel Peace Prize he took with him ... wife, his father, his brother and Ralph Aber... who had been arrested with him on each ... those thirty occasions and become his invaria... comrade-in-arms and, as King joked, cons... cell-mate.

... that December evening in Oslo King, stern... dressed in the customary black frock-coat ... filled with dignity accepted his Prize as the ...ader of America's blacks.

In Oslo he was more than a spokesman for ...qual rights and justice for the dark-skinned pa...ahs of his country. He spoke as a man concerned ...r the fate of the entire world, who rejected ...he cynical notion that nation after nation must ...piral down a militaristic stairway into the hell ...f thermonuclear destruction". He spoke of the ...eprivations to which hundreds of millions of peo...le in the world were subjected and called for ...an all-out world war on poverty"—not only its ...symptoms but also its basic causes.

King returned to the United States crowned ...ith Nobel laurels. In New York endless ban...quets and receptions awaited him. At the airport ...n his home-town of Atlanta, white Southerners— ...h miracle!—asked for his autograph. In Wash...ington he was an honoured guest.

The country could be proud of such a son and ...e wanted to be proud of his country—after all, ...as not this the country in which an unknown ...black pastor could, in less than ten years, devel...p a remarkable talent for public life and be...me a figure of world standing?

He could now become a black who, like a gild...d toy, would be used to console other "second-...class citizens". But King did not want to be-

come a "symbolic negro" like Ralph Bunche, one of the UN secretary-general's deputies. King was able to free himself of vanity and ambition, thinking not of his own merits but of the scale of the problems that remained. He was not to be tamed.

"I live every day under a threat of death and it is a fine contrast to have people say nice things," he told a mass reception in New York. "I wish I could stay on the mountain, but the valley calls me. There are people in the valley of despair in Mississippi that need hope. I've got to go back to the valley."

And he did go back to the valley. He took off his black frock-coat and gave every penny of the 54,000 dollars Nobel Prize to the movement. In January 1965 he chose to "talk" not with King Olaf of Norway or President Johnson of the United States or Pope Paul VI, but with Jim Clark, the police chief of Selma, Alabama. Martin Luther King had again aimed the weapon of "direct action" against racism.

The Nobel laureate brought his people out on to the streets of this town, the population of which numbered 14,400 whites and 15,100 blacks. He opened a long campaign for the right of blacks to register as voters without a property qualification or discriminatory checks of loyalty, literacy or ability to "interpret" the state constitution. Blacks constituted more than 40 per cent of Alabama's population, but their political weight in elected bodies was non-existent and only a few thousand blacks were registered on voting rolls. The state resembled Tuskegee in this respect (the reader will recall the earlier description in this book). The famous 1964 law

affirming the right of blacks to vote did not guarantee this right in the eyes of Sheriff Clark, George Wallace and others.

Jim Clark was as cruel and stubborn as "Bull" Connor in Birmingham, while Selma was indifferent to the truths proclaimed in Oslo concerning the effectiveness of non-violence.

Once again King rang the bell of freedom, leading march after march to the court house, where the registrar's office was located. Day after day Jim Clark and his men seized, drove off or arrested the marchers. The isolated blacks who succeeded in entering the court house were subjected by the registrar's office to "literacy tests" which would have defeated professional philologists. A racist managed somehow to throw himself on King and struck him twice on the temple before the police intervened.

"We shall overcome!" the blacks sang. "Never!" proclaimed the badge Jim Clark pinned to his chest beside his sheriff's star.

In seven weeks 2,000 people were sent to prison.

"When the King of Norway participated in awarding the Nobel Prize to me he surely did not think that in less than sixty days I would be in jail . . . Why are we in jail? . . . This is Selma, Alabama. There are more Negroes in jail with me than there are on the voting rolls," King wrote from behind bars.

When the police killed Jimmie Lee Jackson, a black woodcutter, King called for a mass march from Selma to Montgomery, the state capital. On March 7 the march was broken up and the marchers savagely beaten on the outskirts of Selma by police sent by Governor Wallace. Mount-

ed policemen pursued blacks, crushing and trampling them. "So you wanted to march, did you, mammy? Well, march now!" yelled one, overtaking a fleeing elderly woman. A total of 78 blacks were injured.

That was how Alabama welcomed the Nobel prize-winner.

But once again the violence of the racists was objectively helpful to King. Once again death, blood and broken ribs were the price that had to be paid for public attention. The echo of the bloody conflict in Alabama resounded throughout America, arousing a wave of sympathy and support for the men and women struggling for equal rights.

King called for a second march from Selma to Montgomery.

Fearing bloodshed, the federal authorities intervened to prohibit the march. White Americans coming from all over the country to participate in the march met with unrelenting hatred. James Reeb, a white clergyman from Boston, was caught and beaten to death by racists at the door of a black restaurant in Selma where he had gone for a meal. Then Viola Luizzo, a white housewife from Detroit and the mother of five children, was killed at the wheel of her car. The events in Selma had now assumed the proportions of a national crisis. Just as had happened a year previously during the Birmingham events, they forced the president of the United States to speak.

The march succeeded at the third attempt and the marchers reached Montgomery—under the protection of federal troops dispatched by the White House.

King delivered a speech in front of the Capitol in Montgomery, where the state legislators meet. The Capitol building is not far from Dexter Church where, during the bus boycott ten years before, King had begun his new life. While shaking hands with his parishioners on the church-porch, he had been able to see the dome of the Alabama congress. An entire revolution in his life had passed since then and now, returning to Montgomery in a spring downpour, he spoke to the crowd, answering those who asked with increasing impatience when the disturbance would end.

They told us we would not get here, he said. There were those who said we would get here only over their dead bodies, but the whole world knew that we were here now. We were standing before the Alabama authorities and telling them that we would not permit anyone to order us about.

How long would this continue? However difficult that moment was, however discouraging the hour, it would not last long, because the truth cast down would always rise up again. How long would this last? Not long, because no lie could live eternally. How long? Not long, because his audience would itself reap what it had sown.

The Selma campaign had two measurable outcomes. Three people were killed, dozens maimed and 3,800 arrested; and only fifty blacks were added to the electoral rolls. But there was also a third outcome. The blacks gained the adoption by the US congress of another law: Voting Rights Act of 1965, which gave the federal authorities, not the Southern racists, the right to appoint registrars responsible for compiling voting rolls.

On August 6, 1965, President Johnson signed this act into law in the congress building. Among those present at the ceremony was Martin Luther King.

GHETTO UPRISINGS

I slammed the door of my apartment and locked it. I had learned to turn my key in the lock three years previously after the apartment had been burgled (not much was taken, incidentally). The experienced detective who arrived showed me how easy it was to open a door that had been slammed, but not locked. He asked for my UN pass—a strip of plastic—inserted it in the crack between the door-jamb and the door, gently and deftly pressed the bolt of the Yale lock and swung open the door with the grin of a conjuror showing off a simple trick to a simpleton. Now I locked my door, not forgetting to say a mental word of thanks to the black-suited detective from our 20th precinct, who had not produced his own identity card because, I am firmly convinced, he was not simply a detective from the local precinct, like the officer who came with him, but an FBI agent reacting to reports in Soviet newspapers of a burglary at the New York office of *Izvestia.* The thieves were never caught, but I took my visitor's advice firmly to heart.

I walked to the elevator down a long corridor covered with a soft, blue carpet Let us imagine that I pressed the buttons of both elevators, the passenger elevator and the freight elevator. They rise smoothly to the eighth floor, where the doors, controlled by the elevator operators, swish open. I have two elevators to choose from: the spick-

and-span, gleaming passenger elevator, and the freight one—neat and not dirty, but with cardboard boxes in the corner and a smell of rubbish and decay. There are also two operators: one for the residents, the other for goods and rubbish. One is white, the other black. Affable, grey-haired Mike gestures invitingly with his white glove, as if demonstrating the absolute hygiene of his elevator. From the other elevator a pendulous-lipped, sullen black looks out with incomprehension: why was he called if the passenger elevator was free and the resident was unencumbered by a pile of boxes or suitcases?

The black was much more amiable before Christmas, when his elevator and help were needed to take cartons of whisky, gin and vodka up to the eighth floor: at Schwab House on Riverside Drive there are many elevator operators, doormen, postmen and garagemen and as one runs through them in one's mind before Christmas, fearing through forgetfulness to spoil one's relations with someone for an entire year, one realises that not less than 35 or 40 bottles will have to be distributed in compulsory Christmas presents. The sight of the cartons with their labels brings the black operator out of his semi-somnolent state. Grasping how matters stand, he changes his democratic form of address—"mister"—for a respectful "sir". His capacious trolley appears and together we unload cartons from the boot of my car on to it. The black elevator operator cheerfully pushes the trolley along a narrow passage to the freight elevator and then twists and turns to ensure that the owner of the cartons is not squeezed into a corner and does not touch the walls, on which there

are invisible traces of rubbish from the 300 apartments in this large block.

He pulls a metal lever and we ascend smoothly to the eighth floor with our valuable load. Then he pulls the cartons over the carpet in the corridor to my apartment, says "good evening, m'am!" to my wife, looks at me questioningly—where do I want the cartons?—and lingers by the door, for residents do not usually allow him further. The cartons stacked, he straightens up, all expectation. He is the first in a long queue of those eager to wish me the compliments of the Christmas season and I offer him a choice from any of the cartons. He is no fool and chooses Scotch whisky.

The black operator often smells of spirits and as Christmas approaches the smell is more noticeable and more frequent. He is unkempt, his eyes are inflamed and his lips are grey and parched. He never looks one straight in the eye, as if guilty of something, and shakes his head like a hard-driven horse making a last attempt to throw off a lifetime's weariness. He is evidently more than 50 years old and will never rise further or higher and no doubt he dreams of one thing—to ride between floors in his elevator to the end of his days, carrying the belongings of residents as they arrive or leave and collecting the abundant garbage of American families (neatly wrapped, thank heaven, in boxes and bags) from the "garbage rooms" beside the freight elevator on each floor.

He dreams of subsisting on this rubbish to the end of his days, but he could be fired, for he smells of drink too often. He has his own little world, closed to all the residents, with its own

joys and griefs. His friends are the black maids working in this apartment house, where many wealthy people live. They prefer the freight elevator, although they could use the passenger one —there is no segregation here—and the black operator, as a man, plays a protective role towards them. He is not the weakest in their company and probably they have their secrets and their frank opinions about the residents, about "Charlie", the boss of all the doormen and elevator operators. But shhh . . . Secrets and opinions stay between floors.

In our half of the house one black always uses the passenger elevator. He is a wealthy man, for he lives on the fifteenth floor, where apartments are very expensive. He is self-confident and has a beautiful black wife. Perhaps he is the symbolic black resident of our house?

There are other blacks in the house, but they do not live in it or even belong among the half-dozen doormen who guard the glass front doors (and are all white). We have a black in a dry-cleaning establishment on the ground floor. Handsome, slim, with cultivated features, he hands out dry-cleaned, ironed clothes wrapped in cellophane to the residents. He had knocked at my door on that memorable day when two detectives were sitting in my apartment, asking me what had been stolen and whether my door had been locked or merely slammed shut. The experienced master of door opening had cast a glance at the black appearing at the door with a coat-hanger and I had read in his gaze: "Well, for example, this black boy could have entered your apartment by the same simple means that I have just demonstrated".

I did not respond to his glance.

There are blacks in the garage under the apartment house and now we shall have to make our delayed choice between the two operators of the two elevators. Either can take me down to the sub-basement which, in order not to offend those living there, is called the garden floor. Passing along the corridor of the garden floor, I walk out the back door, but instead of going on to the street I turn left and descend half a dozen steps to the garage. Inside, to the right of the door, in a permanent bay, stands a large, gleaming black Cadillac, which receives especial care. On the end of its radio aerial is an artificial rose. The garage of our apartment house is not a small one—there are some one hundred cars. The air of this cavern filled with cars is close. The vehicles stand in close rows, neatly parked in the spaces marked by grey posts. On Fridays and Saturdays cars enter one after the other and all the access-ways are jammed. To reach the exit ramp a single car must circumnavigate a dozen others, zig-zagging from place to place. This is a task for virtuosi, who manoeuvre the cars with the same ease that an athlete moves his body. They feel the back bumper of a car as if it were the nape of their neck and take as much care of it. In their experienced hands a car's engine roars, the vehicle leaps sharply backwards, to the right, forwards, to the left, back again, the brakes are jammed on and there the car is, bouncing on its springs, parked in line five centimetres from the post which threatened to scratch its untouched beauty.

In this underground mini-kingdom of cars, one of thousands in New York, blacks are in

command. In 1962, when I moved from Park Avenue to Riverside Drive, where the social tone was lower but there was more air from the Hudson, whites worked in the garage during the daytime while blacks worked there at night. I do not know if this is progress, but now blacks work there round the clock. One—the oldest and most good-natured—worked during the dead hours of the night. The foreman was the youngest—slim, supple, elegant. There were two strong men, one of whom, a man of medium height with unusually wide chest and shoulders, would probably have made a weight-lifter, while the other, tall and angular, had the makings of a boxer. How prodigal of physical strength African genes are! The fifth man always wore a hat, tipped at an angle, which gave him a comic appearance. His manners were mild.

These were working men. They had nothing of the lackey's spirit, whether expressed in impudence or servility, about them; indeed, the lackey's spirit is, in general, alien to Americans employed in the country's enormous service industry. Sometimes they spoke sharply, not mincing their words if one had not warned them in advance that one needed one's car at a particular time and it had been parked in the most distant corner and would now have to be extracted by complicated manoeuvres involving the other cars. They did their jobs to the letter, but they knew their rights and had their dignity. They were usually monosyllabic and not very friendly. Of course, they did not have time, but they could hardly have been so sullen when at home in Harlem with their families and friends. In this sullenness I saw the unvarying working mood of

the black, who, for example, drives car after car to the exit ramp—all of them for white men. The conclusion to be drawn from this is obvious.

The morning rush-hour had passed and there were almost no cars in the garage. The black attendant in the tip-tilted hat quickly drove out my "lagoon-green" Chevrolet.

I emerged from underground into the light of 74th Street, turned right, then after crossing three avenues and Broadway, turned left and drove north along the western edge of Central Park.

I was going to Harlem, which began from 106th Street, beyond the northern edge of the park.

It was a warm, sunny October noon. To the right, the stone wall of the park could be glimpsed; in the park the greenery was still fresh. To the left were the grey walls of apartment houses, the steps leading up to the Natural History Museum and the tall brown blocks of West Central Park Village.

When the avenue is free of traffic, one can cover nine or ten blocks—each marked off by a street—without being stopped by a red light. Harlem was no more than ten minutes drive away. But even in ten minutes, much can go through one's mind, if one is absorbed in old thoughts and observations that one lives with from day to day.

I reflected that I was no longer a novice in New York. In the five long years I had lived there I had lost interest in the city more than once before finding it again. I had driven to Harlem on many occasions, alone or with colleagues;

sometimes I had accompanied visitors from Moscow, who usually found it hard to understand why these apartment houses, old but externally quite respectable, with fire-escapes zig-zagging across them, should be called slums. I had been to meetings there during the day and to bars at night. I had visited Harlem on the July evening in 1964 when, after a long lull, the latest uprising had broken out. On 125th Street, a "transit" route leading to the bridges and to Queens, I had not seen a single white, either on the pavements or in cars, apart from white cops, helmeted, standing back to back in twos or threes at intersections, as if expecting an attack from any quarter. Everything had passed off safely—no one laid a finger on me.

Why, despite this personal experience, was I again the prey of anxiety, just as I had been on that December evening on the streets of black Chattanooga? A trip I had made long before to a province in south-west Sudan came back into my memory. There, in a little town and later in the savannah and among the black crags where a savage tribe of Nubians lived, I had caught the curious glances of the "natives" and had unexpectedly understood their meaning, conscious for the first time that I was the only white in a crowd of black-skinned people. But in the Sudan I had been free of this anxiety. It seemed to have come from nowhere. In New York it was a constant obsession.

My wife, fortunately, had remained immune to the highly contagious disease of "everyday racism". Why, then, when strolling with our small son Kolya and ten-year-old Tanya in a park by the Hudson with other women and

children, had she involuntarily taken care when confronted with unfamiliar young blacks? Crime reports in the newspapers and on television, so often mentioning that the criminal was black, and cocktail-party stories of this or that woman friend who had had her bag snatched on the street fuel such fear and anxiety. But is that all?

When you live for a long time in the United States you become insidiously penetrated by the "guilt complex" of which Americans with a conscience speak and write—a collective historical guilt for all that has been committed against the blacks that you feel regardless of personal or hereditary involvement. This "complex" gives rise, in those same Americans with a conscience, to the feeling, sometimes instinctive and irrational, that these people, these blacks from Harlem, have acquired an unreasoning, indiscriminate collective right to revenge, since history has crippled them right up to the present day, dooming them to live in a ghetto.

Harlem lay thirty blocks from the white neighbourhood where Schwab House, the apartment house in which we lived, was located. But Harlem came closer year by year. During the day and in the evening its inhabitants made sorties into the white districts—not just errand-boys from the shops and dry-cleaners', waiters in restaurants, temperamental jazz musicians in the Light House bar and prostitutes propping up the evening shopwindows, but also shy panhandlers who asked for a quarter because, they told you, they had just arrived from Tennessee and had not yet found work, and desperate gangs of young people who wandered the

Broadway sidewalks on sweaty summer evenings and were given a wide berth by fearful passers-by.

More and more blacks were moving into old, cheap houses on the side-streets, while more and more affluent whites were abandoning Manhattan for the suburbs, where the air was cleaner, life quieter and the barriers to blacks stronger. The barriers were not only financial: they also included many traps set by landowners to avoid selling house-plots to blacks, for if a black moves into a white area land-prices fall. The flight of the whites was part of the general exodus, as a result of which the white population of New York had dropped by more than a million during the post-war years, balanced by a virtually equivalent rise in the black and Puerto-Rican population.

I was in Harlem now, making a visual reconnaissance as I circled its main avenues and side-streets. There were no whites at all on the side-streets. White faces could be seen on the main thoroughfares, but they were few and mostly in cars. Policemen stood guard at the intersections, their numbers swelled by blacks —after the Harlem uprising of 1964 one black had been promoted through the ranks to captain and now headed the entire police force of the ghetto.

I decided not to leave my car in a side-street: it would not be long before someone relieved his feelings by throwing a brick through the windscreen. I parked at the intersection of 125th Street and Seventh Avenue in view of a policeman on point duty, glancing round as I got out: there were no barbed glances.

I left my car and walked with a careless stride along the pavements of Harlem, childishly increasing in height in my own eyes and trying self-critically to stop the process. I swelled in my own eyes, but not without registering white cops and passers-by—potential sources of rescue. All the same, this was Harlem, a ghetto not only large but also comparatively "open", with many white shopkeepers and pawnbrokers, a district to which businessmen, city employees and politicians paid fleeting visits in the line of work and where one more white face on the pavement would not attract attention.

The street I was on, 125th Street, looked like any other shopping and entertainment thoroughfare in America. Of course, there was not the dazzling chic of Fifth Avenue, the shops were poorer, there was more rubbish under the marquees of cinemas and the doors and counters of bars were of inferior quality. And everyone was black: there were black store-dummies in the shop windows, black actors on the cinema posters and books about black Africa and the America of the blacks in the bookshops. A separate world with its own colour. It had begun to be proud of this colour, not ashamed, and the slogan "Black is beautiful!" could already be seen on the walls of Harlem.

There was no one at the headquarters of the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee; mimeographed announcements were pinned to the locked door. Stokely Carmichael, the charismatic new leader of the committee, a young man with the chiselled, chocolate-coloured features of a Nubian god, had set the alarm bells ringing in America with the slogan "black power".

The closed door on the dirty staircase giving me no insight into what "black power" meant, I went to have dinner at a well-known Harlem restaurant, Frank's Chop, on 125th Street between Eighth Avenue and St. Nicholas's Square. There "black power" looked acceptable to whites. There were as many white diners as black, but the blacks conceded nothing to the whites in their appearance—these were members of the black bourgeoisie, dressed in business suits and accompanied by well-groomed, beautiful women. The black waiters were well-trained and dignified. Seeing one more white face, the black maitre d'hôtel did not blink, but led me to an empty table.

In the green water of an acquarium pink lobsters destined for the table twitched their whiskers beneath a stream of fresh water bubbling from a hose. Near the entrance, a special table stood respectfully distanced from the others. A notice over the table bore the words "Mayor's corner" and there was also a presentation photograph of John Lindsay, then the mayor of New York, a man still young with a masculine, handsome face. The mayor was pictured smiling in his "corner" at Frank's Chop.

While I was waiting for my roast spare-ribs Texan-style a voice over a loudspeaker announced: "Ladies and gentlemen, we are pleased to inform you that our guest today is Senator Javits. He has just arrived and is now dining in our restaurant." Jacob Javits is the senior senator from New York State, although less known to the outside world than Robert Kennedy, then the junior senator from the state. Both senators often visited Harlem.

The tranquil comfort of Frank's Chop gave me the feeling that my fears were, perhaps, exaggerated and that affairs in Harlem were proceeding normally. If this were not so, surely Senator Javits, Mayor Lindsay and all these white men chatting amiably with blacks over a good meal in the midst of a district offensively dubbed—no doubt as the result of some misunderstanding—a ghetto would not have found the restaurant so pleasant a place to frequent?

But after I had paid for the food and easy ambiance of Frank's Chop and left the restaurant, a few steps along 125th Street and up a flight of stairs brought me to the headquarters of the New York branch of the Congress of Racial Equality (CORE), a national black organisation which had contributed many activists to the battle for racial equality, desegregation and civil rights (among them the three young men who had disappeared for ever near the Mississippi township of Philadelphia) and had now approved the slogan "Black Power". I found several young blacks there, two of whom—Wilbert Kirby, the vice-president of the organisation, and Robert Harris, the treasurer—were energetic to the point of abruptness.

Their first reaction was openly hostile. To be a journalist was little recommendation, although the time had not yet come when militant black leaders would ban white reporters from their press-conferences entirely. However, I was helped by the fact that I was a Soviet journalist—the curiosity of the young blacks triumphed.

The following is a transcript of our conversation, omitting my questions. Kirby and Harris thought in the same way and I was interested

in the general pattern of their thinking. I noted a new element in their terminology. They talked of blacks, not negroes, while the word Afro-American was also in currency. "Negro" was felt by radical blacks to be almost as offensive as the degrading "nigger".

"Black? We consider that black is beautiful. We don't intend to deny our colour. I used to be offended when I was called black. Now I love the word.

"'Black Power'? We need it for unity. After all. other national minorities struggling for their rights—Jews, the Irish, Italians—joined together earlier. Whites see this slogan as a threat to their power structure, which means white power. They ask us: 'What do you mean by 'Black Power'? Doesn't it mean that you will treat us as we have treated you for three hundred years?' No, that isn't what we intend. But we want the political and economic unification of blacks.

"The very words 'black power' came about as a means of reaching the masses and uniting them around a slogan they understood. The words are simple but expressive. You, after all, must know how important unity is if you want to achieve something.

"Roy Wilkins simply has a black skin, but he isn't a black. He thinks in a white way—he has a white soul. We consider him a white man.

"We are trying to give blacks pride in their blackness. Of course, we should fight for human, not for civil rights. If you are recognised as a human being, you will have civil rights as well.

"You say that who a person is counts most and the colour of his skin is not the most im-

portant thing. Agreed. You've probably guessed, of course, that we know that as well as you. But this has been a racist country from the very beginning. We aren't recognised as people. Of course colour isn't important, but what do they look at when you come in the door? Above all, at your colour. They don't consider a black who is fifty or sixty years old a man, but call him by the offensive word 'boy'.

"George Washington, the father of the country, traded in slaves. Do you think he would have traded in whites?"

"The North won a military victory in the civil war, but the South won ideologically. Isn't that so? Doesn't the existence of this ghetto in the North mean that the South won an ideological victory?

"If they hadn't needed us they would have destroyed us,—they would have done to us just what the nazis did to the Jews. At any rate, they destroyed our history. Take a school in New York. They teach European history there, but not black history. By destroying our history they destroy us, too, they rob us of our roots.

"Our enemies are the 'wasps' (white anglo-saxon protestants), but they want to turn everyone against us—the Irish, the Jews and so on. But we are no-one's enemies, we are struggling for existence. I want to stress that this is a struggle for human, not civil, rights. We don't need all these civil-rights acts.

"What did they do when four little black girls were killed in Birmingham? They didn't send troops against George Wallace. But when a civil war began in Vietnam they moved with all their strength to defend their system there, too.

"Now whites are clutching their foreheads and saying: 'What have we done? In school we taught blacks what whites are. Now they know whites through and through. But we know nothing about blacks.' "

* * *

Their words told me almost nothing new. They were valuable not because of the revelations they contained but because they were typical, because they confirmed once again the thoughts and moods typical of radical, politically active young blacks. The categorical division of people into whites and blacks, ignoring the absolutely fundamental point that there are different whites and different blacks, the showy but hazy notions of "thinking white" and "thinking black"—all this put me on my guard, although I realised that one extreme always contains the seeds of its opposite and that it is hard to expect balance from those who have so long been the victims of racial extremism. This weakness was immediately seized upon by the leading newspapers, which accused radicals of black racism and sought to compromise the slogan "black power". Yet, if the provocative surface of this slogan was stripped away, a rational core and a practical purpose remained. Black Americans really did need political unity, did need to use their economic weight (at least their purchasing power, which American businessmen could not ignore) and their votes to achieve their goals outside the framework of the two ruling bourgeois parties, which were accustomed to solve the problem of the blacks according to the rules of "political football".

There was more social and political truth in our conversation on the second floor than there had been in the cosy atmosphere of racial harmony at Frank's Chop—which was localised and therefore deceptive. Harlem did not live by that restaurant truth in October 1966, a year after the uprising in Watts, the Los Angeles ghetto, and almost a year before the rebellions in Newark and Detroit.

"How long?" was the rhetorical question Martin Luther King asked when, despite the racists, he succeeded in marching from Selma to Montgomery. "Not long!" he replied, answering those who had lost patience. Alas, instead of diminishing, the problems grew. The sarcasm with which the young men in Harlem spoke of civil-rights acts was not without grounds. These acts, won through self-sacrificing struggle, had, of course, brought benefits. The struggle itself had straightened the American black's spine and taught him firmness and dignity. But when he gained legal civil rights he saw more acutely than ever before that, while he had been given formal equality, actual inequality remained. Not improved legislation, but removal of the system's fundamental defects was needed.

While King and others were rousing the mass of blacks in the South and beating at the system of racism with the battering-ram of marches, discovering that this system resembled not only a brick wall but also an all-engulfing swamp, blacks in the North were bursting the ghetto apart with their furious rage.

The centre of events had shifted north and I must now temporarily break off this account

of my subject, Martin Luther King, to look at the ghetto rebellions which shook America. Such investigation is necessary in order to understand King's evolution during the last period of his life.

I shall move from my own modest testimony to more convincing evidence, that of statistics and of people who grew up in the ghetto—of black writers who, unlike the white journalist Griffin, had no need to change the colour of their faces to understand the spirit of the American black.

* * *

James Baldwin's book *The Fire Next Time* received the accolade of being described as "prophetic" by contemporaries. This was not just an honour: it was also true, for the author's prophecies were not slow in being realised. The title blazed in red letters on a dust-jacket as black as ash when the book first appeared in New York in 1962. Baldwin, a child of Harlem, passionately warned his fellow-countrymen in the words of an old song sung by black slaves: "God gave Noah the rainbow sign: No more water, the fire next time!".

The first fire blazed up two years later, when Harlem rebelled.

The book was like a signal rocket, soaring up into a night of ignorance and indifference and dragging into view the irregular ranks of a spontaneous army of avengers as they drew close.

The "intransigence and ignorance of the white world might make that vengeance inevitable —a vengeance that does not really depend on...

any person or organization and that cannot be prevented by any police force or army: historical vengeance, a cosmic vengeance, based on the law that we recognize when we say, 'Whatever goes up must come down,'" Baldwin wrote.

The blind, unbridled, elemental quality of the uprisings demonstrated in their own way the vivid accuracy of Baldwin's warning of "a cosmic vengeance" that did not depend on any person or organisation. The professional undercover agents of J. Edgar Hoover confirmed the truth of Baldwin's prophecy five years later, when they scoured Detroit and Newark: the rioters had neither leaders nor organisation.

James Baldwin became my first indirect guide to Harlem. In his book he led me not only through the Harlem streets, the Harlem desert, but also into the family where the birth of little James, the writer's nephew, was celebrated with bitter joy (the boy was the dedicatee of James Senior's insights). He took me, too, into the confused, fractured, pain-racked and hate-filled soul of the ghetto dweller.

The white New Yorker, while avoiding the ghetto, sees dark-skinned people in his part of the city. Baldwin traced their daily path. "They get up in the morning and go down to meet 'The Man'," he wrote. "They work in the white man's world all day and come home in the evening to this fetid block. They struggle to instill in their children some private sense of honor or dignity which will help the child to survive."

Baldwin penetrated into the psychology of the white policemen standing at the intersections and on the pavements of Harlem. "... There are

few things under heaven more unnerving than the silent, accumulating contempt and hatred of a people. He moves through Harlem, therefore, like an occupying soldier in a bitterly hostile country; which is precisely what and where he is, and is the reason he walks in twos or threes."

One must, from one's earliest years as a black child, be conscious of the enemy in this policeman, one must scrutinise him for a long time with the sharp eyes of hatred and fear. And then the thought will come like an insight: "The white policeman standing on a Harlem street corner finds himself at the very centre of the revolution now occurring in the world. He is not prepared for it."

I met James Baldwin when the wave of "long, hot summers" had already begun, justifying his prophecies. A product of Harlem, he had nevertheless rented an apartment beyond its borders on the corner of West End Avenue and 88th Street: no one knew better than he the destructive effect life in the ghetto had on the human personality. During the 1950s Baldwin lived for a long time in Paris, where many black American writers, artists and performers, unable to bear the atmosphere of their own country, settled in a late, black version of the "lost generation" of Ernest Hemingway, Gertrude Stein, F. Scott Fitzgerald and others during the 1920s. He tasted profound despair and considered not returning to his homeland at all, but the fresh life shown by the struggle for equality aroused new hopes and his Paris haven became the refuge of a deserter. From the early 1960s Baldwin threw himself into this struggle as one of its fieriest and most articulate spokesmen. It

was true that he went away to France or Greece to write: in New York, he told me, there was no possibility of creative concentration.

It was difficult to catch him and I was conscious of a feeling of excitement as I stood in the passage of his New York apartment one beautiful morning, listening to his sister Gloria call loudly: "Jimmy, a man from *Izvestia* has come to see you."

Jimmy came out of his room—short, with a small face; an expressive mouth and large, protruding eyes were the most prominent features. Frail, his movements as supple as the dancer's. There was nothing of the battler, the tribune or the orator about him. But when he was aroused, one immediately felt the Baldwin temperament, throbbing in his books, essays and speeches. His round, passionate eyes flashed with a scorching fire: fire enough for an entire life, although he could tame it, the fire of self-combustion.

"Civil rights?" he said, his voice swelling with anger at the realisation that there was still someone who had failed to grasp quite evident truths. "Civil rights?! That's a scandal! The question isn't about civil rights, because I've been here, in this land, for centuries. It's a question of the emancipation of blacks and not just blacks . . ."

He returned to his favourite idea, that of the seemingly strange yet quite comprehensible psychological inter-dependence of oppressor and oppressed, the idea that racism cripples not only the oppressed but also the oppressors, depriving them of humanity. He developed this theme in the play *Blues for Mister Charlie*, which was

devoted to Medgar Evers, the leader of the Mississippi blacks killed by the racists in 1963.

"They can, of course, kill me because of the colour of my skin," he said, pacing softly across the room, where books shared the space with records, boxes of tape recordings and a stereo system: he needed the bitter, passionate yearning of the blues. "They can kill me. But I'm not the one who is in prison—I'm speaking about spiritual prison. I know that man is man, but there are many people in this country who don't know that... Whites don't know who the blacks are and so they don't know who they are... Whites have the illusion that they can slight or even kill a person because of the colour of his skin or the shape of his eyes. Blacks have no illusions from childhood on—they know who the whites are. The facts have to be changed..."

I left with mixed impressions. Was he free? Personally, yes, although he joked that it would be better for him not to appear in the South in *Blues for Mister Charlie*. He was popular. He was not afraid of the powers that be—on the contrary, Robert Kennedy during his term as attorney-general had courted Baldwin, for the White House needed the good will of a prestigious writer in black intellectual circles. He was the idol of student youth, both black and white. He had many friends among white Americans, who respected rather than belittled him. He enjoyed access to the intellectual elite of New York, whose doors are opened by intelligence and talent, not the colour of one's skin. He lashed the shortcomings of the United States, but his books were published—after all, they brought the publishers large profits. He had

many readers and *The Fire Next Time* had been a best-seller. As a writer, there were no restrictions on his freedom of self-expression.

What, then, does a man need? The question is a naive one if we are talking of man as citizen, intimately linked to society and experiencing pain at its problems. A man really needs the whole world—a world organised justly. The more sensitive and perceptive a person, the more painfully is he offended by the disorganisation of the world. And Baldwin was the prisoner of a single subject, doomed to write about people with black skins and not simply about people. Taking the risk of touching upon a delicate area, I asked Baldwin whether he intended tackling some other, non-black subject from the innumerable aspects of human life. He told me he was thinking about this.

Yet if he betrayed the black theme he would betray his people and his talent, dooming himself as a writer. He, of course, knew this. When I asked his opinion of contemporary American writers, Baldwin answered sharply: "In the broad sense, I don't understand what they are writing about."

In the narrow sense, of course, he did. But as a black writer he refused to understand how it was possible to write about something else while the fundamental problem of freedom and justice remained unresolved.

Let us return, however, to Baldwin's words about civil rights. His judgement was the same as that expressed by the activists of the Congress of Racial Equality. Only recently, desegregation of public places had been seen as the main condition of equality: now this was spoken

of sarcastically. The right to sit on a stool beside a white at a Southern lunch-counter had not solved every problem. The struggle for civil rights led by King in the South had proved a necessary but not a sufficient condition of real equality. Removal of the humiliating "Whites Only" notices really benefited only the black bourgeoisie, which was sensitive to infringements of its social standing. The signs were taken down, but the poverty, unemployment and lack of education of poor blacks remained inviolate. In 1965, summing up the interim results of the struggle, King noted bitterly: "What good does it do to be able to eat at a lunch counter if you can't buy a hamburger?"

The limits of the slogan of civil rights itself were especially clear in the North. Blacks there had long enjoyed civil rights, given them by state laws even before federal legislation had been adopted, and the offensive signs dividing the races had long since disappeared, yet ghettoes and de facto segregation still existed.

It was here that the centre of the struggle had shifted—from the rural South to the urban North. This was the result in large measure of the physical migration of black Americans to the North.

In 1910 there were ten millions blacks in the United States, 91 per cent of whom lived in the South. By 1966 the black population of the US had risen to 22 million; the number of blacks living in towns with more than 50,000 inhabitants had increased by 450 per cent, from 2.6 million to 14.8 million, and there were eleven times more blacks living in the North—9,7 million as compared to 880,000 in 1910. Seven mil-

lion Northern blacks lived in the twelve largest US cities. (In 1968 blacks constituted more than half the population of Newark and two-thirds of the population of Washington, while, according to official predictions, by 1985 they will form a majority in such large cities as Chicago, Detroit, Philadelphia, Baltimore, Gary, Cleveland, Oakland, Richmond and Saint Louis.)

Official statistics indicated that, in 1967, the unemployment rate was twice as high among black as among white Americans. But these figures are incomplete. If the percentage of underemployment—that is, unemployment largely camouflaged by statistical graphs—is added to the unemployment percentage, the two categories embrace 33-34 per cent of blacks. No less than 40.6 per cent of "non-white" Americans live below the official poverty line, 40 per cent of them in the big cities. In the twelve largest cities of the United States 32.7 per cent of blacks aged from 16 to 19 years were unemployed (the corresponding figure for whites was 11 per cent).

"The dark ghettos are social, political, educational, and—above all—economic colonies," the black sociologist Kenneth Clark wrote in his book *Dark Ghetto*. "Their inhabitants are subject peoples, victims of the greed, cruelty . . . and fear of their masters."

Rapid growth in the black population of the North thus went hand in hand with unemployment, the most generalised indicator of misery and poverty. These two facts meant a concentration not only of humanity but also of despair—a double concentration filled with explosive potential.

To this should be added the situation at the

beginning of the 1960s: unprecedented economic prosperity, which had not affected the overwhelming majority of black Americans, a sated "affluent society" which only tantalised them by its proximity and inaccessibility and the rapid advance of science and technology, resulting in "technological unemployment" for the blacks as automation increased and the need for unskilled labour fell.

Add, finally, an important psychological factor—loss of hope. This merits more detailed attention. The black bending his back in the cotton plantations of the South, oppressed by the petty and large-scale tyranny of the racists and living in constant fear, traditionally dreamed of the North as a place of saving hope, of freedom and a life of dignity. "Hallelujah, I'm on my way to the promised land!" he repeated ecstatically the words of the old song, believing half-mystically that the road to the promised land was the road to the North.

But these unhappy people found, as the black writer Claude Brown has written, that they had fallen from the frying-pan into the fire, for one of the most important aspects of the promised land which they had not suspected was the ghetto slum.

"The children of these disillusioned colored pioneers inherited the total lot of their parents—the disappointments, the anger," Brown wrote. "To add to their misery, they had little hope of deliverance. For where does one run to when he's already in the promised land?"

It was the younger generation in the North, born in the black ghetto, which was without the illusions of its fathers, the "coloured pioneers"

who had burned to reach the promised land. It was in the North that the tragic abyss of the black problem had opened up like a volcanic crater. The sensitive ear could already catch subterranean rumbling beneath its still quiescent surface—a sensitive ear such as that possessed by young black writers. They lived in the crater and were themselves particles of the lava bubbling in the volcano. And they became eloquent interpreters of the generation of black Americans which grew up, not on the patriarchal plantations of the South, but in the mean streets of the Northern ghettoes.

How much pain, self-belittling and challenge there is in the confession of Claude Brown, author of the novel *Manchild in the Promised Land*!

"Our parents coming to Harlem produced a generation of new niggers," Brown wrote with ironic humour, ". . .but this new nigger was something that nobody understood and that nobody was ready for. There was trouble everywhere, every time. Every place I looked, I wasn't understood. I felt like a misfit on just about every job I went to . . . I always wanted to run. It was so difficult. I really didn't have any familiar ground. I guess, in a way, my generation was like the first Africans coming over on the boat . . ."

This autobiographical novel describes the childhood, adolescence and youth of a young black in Harlem's swirling hell with utter frankness, naturalism and self-revelation in language that is sharp and harsh. Claude Brown was brought up by the street, which easily and totally destroyed the counter-weight of his parents' authority: newly arrived from the South, they were

even more lost than their children in the new world of Harlem.

Truancy from school, petty theft, endless beatings from a physically menacing but spiritually lost father who had no other means of upbringing, gangs of nimble boys, cynical, adult in experience, and ready for anything, friends among under-age prostitutes, the daring and dangerous trade in narcotics and early use of drugs, a children's reformatory, more thefts and narcotics, life amid devastated people constantly aware that they were "niggers" in a white man's world—these were the constituents of a Harlem childhood. And all around it an enormous city lived by its own complex laws, not reflecting that all the multiform bitterness and cruelty of the world was penetrating the soul of a small black American child, a city that had no time, where everyone lived for himself and everyone had to make his own way, which demanded total effort and left only indifference to one's fellows.

After reading Claude Brown's book the American writer Norman Mailer observed that it was "the first thing I ever read which gave me an idea of what it would be like day to day if I'd grown up in Harlem".

Poverty is not a crime, but it is a social misfortune. The poverty and lack of rights spawned by racial oppression are by no means identical with meek virtue. Honest people cannot but feel sympathy and solidarity with those who have been humiliated and insulted but no one has yet invented a mechanism that will automatically equip the poor with the angel's wings of immaculate moral purity. Where there are

rats, crowded apartments and day-labour, despair and broken souls are also to be found. When a racial barrier is added to all the other obstacles poverty erects on the path of individual human development, few means of self-affirmation remain to a person, especially a young person, and one of them, alas, is crime.

After the Harlem uprising in July 1964, some highly significant statistics appeared in the newspapers. The average income of Harlem inhabitants was one and a half times less than the average income in New York as a whole, the percentage of unskilled workers was one and a half times greater and the percentage of those employed in well-paid work was three and a half times less. The inhabitants of Harlem and Spanish Harlem, constituting 25 per cent of the population of Manhattan, made up 63 per cent of New Yorkers drawing social-security benefits.

Another series of statistics followed with iron logic from these figures. The crime-rate among Harlem youngsters was double the New York average; there were eight to ten times more drug addicts; the percentage of venereal disease was six times greater; the percentage of tuberculosis victims, one and a half times greater and infant mortality double the New York average.

The state of the black family was a cause of especial concern. The percentage of broken families, divorces and illegitimate children is catastrophically high in the North. In Harlem two out of every five children were growing up without fathers.

When we translate these statistics into the language of social types we find, in particular, the black adolescent so vividly described by Bald-

win and who was destined so forcefully to assert himself.

"... There's no room in it (this structure.—*Ed.*) for him," Baldwin wrote of the Harlem teenager. "If he is really cunning, really ruthless, really strong—and many of us are—he becomes a kind of criminal. He becomes a kind of criminal because that's the only way he can live. Harlem and every ghetto in this city—every ghetto in this country—is full of people who live outside the law. They wouldn't dream of calling a policeman. They wouldn't, for a moment, listen to any of those professions of which we are so proud on the Fourth of July. They have turned away from this country forever and totally. They live by their wits and really long to see the day when the entire structure comes down."

Claude Brown's hero, the tormented city "nigger", victimised by the police, by shopkeepers and by employers, who do not even trouble to reflect how mortally they humiliate and cripple him, concludes that his enemies must be stopped before they destroy him.

Thus inflammable, socially explosive human material was accumulating in the ghetto, within major cities—the focal point of American civilisation. Sparks were always in abundance in the supercharged atmosphere.

Explosions in the ghetto... By the mid-1960s their strength and frequency had grown immeasurably. One after the other, they compiled the chronicle of contemporary America in the flames of burning streets.

At seven o'clock in the evening of August 11, 1965, white police stopped the car of Marquette

Frye, a black American, in Watts, a southern suburb of Los Angeles, where tens of thousands of blacks live in rented houses. Frye was accused of reckless driving. He resisted and blows were exchanged. A crowd quickly formed and someone shouted that a cop had shoved a pregnant black woman. The police, barely able to ward off the crowd, took Frye away. Inflamed by what had happened and by the California heat, the crowd did not disperse; instead, it grew, swelled by people and rumours. Stones were thrown at whites driving through the area and counter-attacks were mounted against police drafted in to re-establish order. The uprising spread rapidly and fiercely, like a forest fire when inflammable material is all around—white policemen, the shops of white exploiters and simply the element of indiscriminate hatred. The uprising overflowed from district to district. At first, individual houses were set on fire, then dozens were put to the torch. The first shops were plundered. Streets were seized by youths in a state of unreasoning despair. Police reinforcements were oil poured on fire.

The flames, literally and figuratively, raged for four days. The carbines and colts of the "forces of law and order" took the lives of 34 blacks. Fires blazed in 150 districts covering an area of 46 square miles. The California national guard drove into the streets of Watts in trucks and jeeps and it was only towards evening on August 14 that the uprising was crushed by 14,000 guardsmen and 1,500 police. According to official statistics, some 10,000 blacks were involved. A total of 1,032 people were injured and 3,952 blacks were arrested. Damage to property was

estimated at 40 million dollars. Six hundred buildings were damaged and 200 were burned to the ground.

A commission to investigate the uprising was set up by California governor Edmund Brown. The sum of 300,000 dollars was allocated for expenses and the millionaire John McCone, former head of the CIA, was chosen to chair the commission. Ring-leaders were sought with the idea of blaming everything on "subversive elements", but even McCone, the retired top spy, was unable to unearth a conspiracy. The uprising was spontaneous.

The commission warned that "the existing breach, if allowed to persist, could in time split our society irretrievably". The August events could be a mere "curtain-raiser" for future violence.

The August uprising dealt a heavy psychological blow to King's conception of non-violent struggle. By coincidence it exploded only five days after President Johnson had signed the Voting Rights Act.

From 1966 the racial front was gripped by new tension, but the record of Watts remained unbroken. An outburst on a hot July 12 in Chicago resulted in three blacks killed by police, dozens injured and 533 arrested. Disturbances also occurred in Cleveland, Ohio.

Then came the record year of 1967. This was generally considered to have presented the most serious internal political crisis since the civil war. The spring saw racial disturbances in Nashville, Tennessee, Jackson, Mississippi and Houston, Texas; the summer was the longest and hottest ever. Racial explosions turned almost

the entire country into a powder-barrel—wherever you stepped, you might be blown into the air. Tampa, Florida ... Cincinnati, Ohio ... Atlanta, Georgia ...

Then an uprising broke out a stone's throw from New York City in Newark, a city more than half of whose 400,000 inhabitants were black.

The spark was the same as that which had ignited Watts. On July 12 the police arrested a black taxi-driver for speeding. A rumour spread that he had been beaten up and a crowd besieged the 4th police precinct on Central Ward, demanding the release of the arrested man. Accusations of police brutality were shouted and stones and bottles were thrown at the walls and windows of the precinct.

In Newark, too, the uprising followed the pattern of a forest fire, raging along Springfield Avenue, the main thoroughfare of the ghetto. The shop-windows of white proprietors were smashed and their shops looted. Wild shooting by the police was met with the weapons of the street—stones, sticks, and bottles filled with petrol. Savage fury was there ready to die against modern organised force. But from attic windows here and there came the infrequent crackle of gun-fire—snipers, who aroused the especial anger and fear of bourgeois America.

And fires, fires, fires ...

On the windows of shops owned by blacks the hurriedly scrawled inscriptions "soul brother" appeared as a defence.

Richard Hughes, governor of New Jersey, drafted national guardsmen into the city and established his temporary command post at the

Roseville arsenal. After all, this was war. After inspecting the area of the uprising, Hughes said that the scale of the destruction reminded him of films depicting the aftermath of nuclear war. The governor's retinue included "hawks" and "doves" and he himself became known as a hawk after giving his guardsmen complete freedom to fire (a presidential commission later set up to investigate the 1967 uprisings noted the "excessive" application of force in Newark). This governor, who had formerly had the reputation of a liberal, behaved more savagely than the racist George Wallace. The national guardsmen outdid "Bull" Connor's police. Unlike the regular army, the national guards of the states are made up of civilians who are mobilised when a governor declares a state of emergency. The guardsmen who crushed the Newark rebellion were all white; they acted as racists and property-owners who had been given a uniform, a carbine and the opportunity to shoot without being punished. Mutual exchanges in Newark amounted approximately to this: if you, nigger, take a crate of beer from a shop, I shall shoot you in the head.

Even Roy Wilkins, who condemned the uprising and approved the use of force, was indignant at the savagery displayed by the guardsmen and described their actions as "an open season" for shooting blacks.

Life magazine published a series of photographs of this "season". A 12-year-old black boy, Joe Bass, was shown lying face down on the pavement in a pool of his own blood, a stream of which was running down the sloping asphalt. He was looking with terrified eyes at the polished

boot of a policeman. The boy could not see all of the beefy policeman, who was not looking at the boy. A cartridge-belt round his waist, a heavy Colt on his hip and a rifle at the ready in his right hand, the man was preparing to step forward. A triangle of white undershirt was visible beneath his blue uniform collar and a cigar was clenched in his teeth. Such was the "hunting season". A moment before, this policeman had killed another black—William Farr, who also lay there on the pavement and had wounded Joe Bass in the neck and thigh. Now he was hurrying forward and the boy's eyes were fixed, fascinated, on the heavy boot ten centimetres from his hand; he lacked the strength to move his hand and was thinking as any panic-stricken, wounded boy might think—does he really want to crush my hand under his heel?

Twenty-one blacks and two whites were killed in Newark and hundreds were injured. Losses also included 889 shops "slightly", "moderately" or totally looted and wrecked.

We arrived in Newark a day after the guardsmen had lifted their blockade of the rebellious ghetto. The city centre was intact and there was nothing to remind one of the storm that had swept through the city.

I was in Newark for the first time, although the city is only half an hour's drive from Manhattan. I had mistakenly thought that Newark was closed to Soviet correspondents, as many conurbations in the industrial north-east around New York City and on the Atlantic seaboard of the US are. My companions were also visiting Newark for the first time and in order not to waste time driving through the streets we bought

a detailed map of the city at the first drug-store. As we sat in our car we spent a long time searching on the map for Springfield Avenue, a thoroughfare known by then to all America.

When we reached the avenue there was no need to check our position. Springfield Avenue was full of pointers—burnt-out houses, broken windows, walls scored by bullets and lines of smashed shop-windows hastily blocked with sheets of plywood. The morning rush-hour was over and evening was still far off, but the traffic on Springfield Avenue was bumper to bumper. Almost all the drivers were white and none was heeding the road rules: instead of looking at the road, they were looking at the pavements and the buildings, refreshing their memories of the recent television pictures of fighting and conflagration. The cars were moving slowly and the drivers were evidently wondering how they would get out of the traffic jam, which extended from one end of the avenue to the other, if shots were suddenly fired.

Nevertheless, they drove along Springfield Avenue. In every town where rioting broke out —and their number exceeded 100 during the summer of 1967—the "open season" on blacks and the outbreaks of arson were followed by this original kind of tourism, as people hurried in their cars to reinforce television reports with their own impressions by gaping at streets where the embers of battle had barely cooled.

We drove along the avenue and inspected the side-streets, where the damage was less. Police cars prowled, their shrieking sirens breaking the deceptive, fragile quiet. Yellow steel helmets could be seen at the rear windows of cars.

Boris Strelnikov, *Pravda* correspondent, and I made a sorty on foot to Springfield Avenue. A queue of black women stood in front of a food-distribution point. They were carrying out cardboard boxes of milk, bread and beans—various city agencies were helping fire victims and the needy. Shopkeepers—white shopkeepers—stood by smashed, plywood-covered shopwindows, answering the questions of white men holding notebooks and pens. The latter were insurance agents or city clerks, touring Springfield Avenue to establish the precise scale of losses (insurance companies throughout the country drew their own conclusions from the riots—and pushed up the cost of insuring property in the ghetto).

We approached one of the men with notebooks, introduced ourselves and asked permission to put a few questions.

"No doubt you are pleased that such shameful things are happening in our country, gentlemen. I hope that we won't give you this pleasure again," was his only reply, delivered in icy tones. Then he turned silently away, making it clear that neither we nor our questions interested him. What could he say on wrecked, burnt-out Springfield Avenue?

In July 1967 the United States was confronted by the spectre of a new civil war. Congress, where anti-black hysteria raged, poured oil on the flames. On July 19 the House of Representatives voted for a riot act against the "instigators" of unrest. The act declared any crossing of state borders (including "crossings" in the form of postal dispatches) with the aim of fomenting and organising riots a criminal offense. On July 20 the House struck down a bill allocating

40 million dollars for the extermination of rats. In rejecting the bill congressmen were openly scoffing at a specific curse of ghetto life.

There are no censuses for rats, but according to an official estimate, New York City alone harbours some 8 million rats—one for every citizen. Untypically, the poor are over the rich in their share of the rat population.

Amid the unprecedentedly tense relations between the races, congress's action took on a symbolic character: blacks were reminded they could scarcely expect understanding from the legislators.

President Johnson hastened to defuse the situation, sharply attacking the congressmen and terming their action "a cruel blow to the poor children of America". "Every year, thousands of those children, many of them babies, are bitten by rats in their homes and tenements," the president said. "Some are killed, many are disfigured for life . . . We're spending Federal funds to protect our livestock from rodents and predatory animals. The least we can do is give our children the same protection that we give our livestock . . ."

Detroit followed on the heels of Newark, marking the culmination of 1967. The events in Detroit cost 43 lives—more than in any other riot in the troubled history of the Northern ghettoes. In terms of statistics, it may be noted that over a four-day period 7,200 blacks were arrested in Detroit, far more than during King's famous campaign in Birmingham, even though the blacks who rose up in the automobile capital of the United States had no desire whatever to fill the jails.

I should like to quote from a report I wrote at the time of the Detroit events and which appeared in *Izvestia*. For all its incompleteness and haste, it conveys in some measure the atmosphere of those super-heated days of turmoil.

New York, July 25. (By telephone from our own correspondent). The request for troops came in the morning. On the instructions of President Johnson it was met immediately. By evening Americans saw on their television screens paratroops trained in riot-control running with full military equipment from military transports drawn up on landing strips. A total of 4,700 soldiers, detachments from two parachute divisions, were airlifted.

Where had the soldiers been airlifted to? To Da Nang? Was this further escalation? Yes, but in Detroit, not Vietnam. The request came not from General Westmoreland but from Governor Romney of Michigan. Those being pacified are not South Vietnamese but Detroit blacks—the "second-class" citizens of the United States of America.

A new eruption in the black ghettoes has taken place. Detroit is filled with the smoke of fires. District after district is in flames. There are fresh ruins... Television correspondents, used to everything, stride in businesslike fashion through the destruction. US governors usually assume the functions of generals and quite recently, during the uprising in Newark, Governor Richard Hughes was transformed into a commanding officer. He dispensed with federal troops and contented himself with national guardsmen, who did not spare bullets in firing at the windows of black homes. Now troops are being

commanded by Governor Romney. After flying over Detroit in a police helicopter, he told reporters that Detroit looked like a bombed city.

Romney sent in 4,000 policemen against the rioting blacks, then hastily mobilised 8,000 national guardsmen. Television screens dispassionately show these young men, too, driving through the streets of Detroit in army trucks and jeeps. They stand in picturesque poses, carbine butts resting on their hips, shifting wads of chewing gum with rock-like jaws. Yesterday they were bank clerks—today they are ready to shoot. To shoot at their fellow citizens—or, to be more precise, at their "second-class" fellow-citizens . . .

Romney considers that he has penetrated to the essence of the riots. Referring to the extensive experience accumulated in the United States, he declared that the first night of a riot was not the most terrible. Yesterday was the second night and Romney was proved right. That was why he made his prudent request to the US president to send airborne troops. The president responded and regular troops were flown to Selfridge air base, thirty miles from Detroit. But the White House let it be understood that the decision whether or not to move them into the city rested with the Michigan governor. US presidents need blacks once every four years—at the elections. Johnson does not want to lose votes in 1968 and has handed the charade of responsibility over to the Republican Romney, his potential rival. The Republican leadership also declares that the government of the Democrats is rapidly bringing the country into a "state of anarchy". This criticism is calculated to appeal

to white Americans frightened by the race riots.

The riots in Detroit followed a week after those in Newark. A week filled with riots and skirmishes that were smaller in scale but too many to count. New York Mayor John Lindsay spent a sleepless night yesterday as a riot brewed in Spanish Harlem.

Congress is furious with the blacks, as the shameful draft legislation on riots approved by the House of Representatives testifies. Scapegoats are being sought in the shape of "agitators" from outside. But "agitators" in the black ghettoes do not come from outside. They have lived there since time immemorial. The commentator Clayton Fritchey pokes fun at the draft bill, pointing to the four "agitators": unemployment, poverty, slums and delinquency. It is these four that have made themselves felt in Detroit. Here is the testimony of one Detroit black. Ripping open his shirt, he displayed his scars to reporters, saying: "I got those in Germany. I fought in Korea, too. I am 42 and I cannot find work."

What can be said of the despair and fury of young blacks, who are aware with the sensitivity of youth of the fate prepared for them by their country—the "richest", "most prosperous", "freest", etc., etc.

In a certain sense, Detroit is the Mecca of US civilisation. Millions of cars are manufactured there. They are excellent cars, but spokesmen for the "American way of life" have also found an auxiliary function for them—to throw dust in the eyes of simpletons abroad. The greater the number of cars and the better they are, the thicker the dust-cloud. The conflagrations in De-

troit have now laid the dust. There is a bitter smell of burning. Not only houses but myths, too, are in flames.

The fear felt by bourgeois America reached its peak after Detroit, where 1,163 fires broke out in four days, but the wave of riots was already in decline.

Some brief notes on characteristic features of that riotous summer and the many and varied lessons to be drawn from it.

The racial upheavals took place against the background of the US war in Vietnam and the already exacerbated internal political situation. Analogies with Vietnam were inescapable. Just as with the Vietnamese, Washington and the city and state authorities talked to their own "coloureds" in the language of the gun. The readiness to use armed force and the speed and "naturalness" with which it was used were striking, testifying in their own way to the extent to which militarism had penetrated the entire life of the United States and the thinking of American politicians.

Vietnam also figured in the balance of payments, explaining the critical situation in the ghettoes: the war in the jungles absorbed 24,000 million dollars a year, as compared to the 1,900 million dollars spent annually on the domestic "war on poverty". President Johnson recalled his promises of a "great society" less and less, while his critics spoke of a "sick society" more and more. Senator Fulbright noted correctly that it was impossible, even psychologically, to wage two wars simultaneously—against the North Vietnamese and against poverty in the United States—since attention, not to mention

resources, was entirely devoted to the former. The riots revealed another aspect of this truth. The dirty war in the jungles, involving the merciless extermination of another people, had psychologically prepared the US leaders and, indeed, the greater part of the population for harsh methods of dealing with blacks—the "other America".

Despite an intensive search for "agitators" and an attempted smear campaign against the rioters, all investigations confirmed without exception that the riots had flared up spontaneously and that the rioters had neither a programme nor clear political and economic aims. Although seats of racial disturbance emerged almost simultaneously in dozens of cities, they were isolated from each other and lacked a united leadership or even recognised leaders. As Senator Fred Harris later observed, the crowd created the leaders, not the leaders the crowd.

Nevertheless, the riots, as already noted, did proceed virtually according to a single pattern, in which it was not difficult to discern their spontaneous class character. The spark was usually struck by an act of police tyranny—white police in a black ghetto—or by long-standing hatred of them. White policemen, the guardians of the hostile order of oppression, became the first target of revenge. The next targets, as a rule, were shops and pawn-shops, shopkeepers, pawn-brokers and restaurateurs—white exploiters in the black ghetto, people who had long since learned how to squeeze dollars from ignorance and poverty and who had gained the reputation of blood-suckers. Investigation showed, for example, that ghetto inhabitants often paid 10-15

per cent more than the residents of white districts for identical goods and groceries.

Mass raids on shops, looting and arson were also convincing evidence of the spontaneous, savage, destructive character of the protest. This was vengeance, not just law-breaking, vengeance precisely aimed at the nation of property-owners. The avengers, too, were the offspring of America, possessing the high-developed reflexes of the consumer society.

Black shopkeepers were usually spared; as Newark showed, they suffered mainly at the hands of national guardsmen, to whom the inscription "Soul brother" was a provocation rather than a defence. At the same time, attempts made by the black bourgeoisie of Detroit to dissuade and pacify the rioters failed to produce results.

The campaign of pacification and punishment mounted by the authorities proceeded with harsh force. Formerly, the local police had been sufficient to hold the blacks in check, but in the summer of 1967 the police were unable to control the rioters with their own forces. Mobilisation of the national guard had been an extremely rare occurrence, but now it became commonplace. This meant not only the Colts and the rifles of policemen, but also armoured personnel carriers, army trucks, jeeps and machine-guns. At last, in Detroit, matters went as far as tanks and regular troops: for the first time since 1943, when violent black unrest occurred (also in Detroit), the army was used to pacify the blacks of the Northern ghetto.

Despite slightly differing positions, all bourgeois America joined forces against the rebels,

from racist Southern senators and FBI head J. Edgar Hoover to Northern liberals. While retaining their reservations concerning the social ulcers of the ghettoes, the liberals nevertheless subscribed eagerly to the slogan of the day—crush without mercy. The press isolated and exaggerated a single feature of the entire complex picture: attacks on property, arson and robbery. All operations undertaken by the army and the police were veiled by references to "law and order". What law? What order? The "law and order" that perpetuated the ghetto?

The mass of apolitical or politically moderate citizens, frightened by the flames and smoke they saw on their television screens, tilted in the direction of out-and-out racists. Politicians, their professional antennae tuned to the moods of this mass, which accounted for millions of electoral votes, played up and inflamed these moods, stressing the idea of street crime, which carried an anti-black message understood by all.

The local authorities were not lacking in initiative, either.

In Newburg, New York State, the police acquired a "new secret weapon", rumours about which were spread in the town by the police themselves. The weapon was a sophisticated aerosol filled with condensed gas. A jet of this was enough to send a rioter immediately to sleep, from which he would awake in a police vehicle or at the police station. This was an early version of Mace gas, with which many American protesters were later to become familiar.

To spite the US congress Nelson Rockefeller, governor of the state of New York, budgeted five million dollars for rat extermination in his state.

John Lindsay, mayor of New York City, reduced the exceptionally high temperature of Harlem by permitting fire hydrants to be opened (these squat iron pillars stand forty or fifty paces apart on the New York pavements). Black children now played round the hydrants during the hot days, spraying each other as well as the passing cars with water. This may seem very little, but it contained an aim revealing considerable psychological perception—that of letting these children feel themselves, at least in this respect, masters of the streets. However, on the evening streets of Manhattan, not to mention Harlem, the heightened bellicosity of the police was almost physically perceptible. At the first sign of unrest Mayor Lindsay hurried into the black neighbourhoods to pour the balm of promises and consolation on to the spirits of their inhabitants.

The teeming ghettoes were especially wary. The chain reaction of the Detroit riots had been caused to a great extent by the fact that more than half a million blacks lived in the city. When the troops moved out of the smouldering ruins, Mayor Jerome Cavanagh, who wanted a permanent solution to the problem, proposed that a thousand specially trained police should be based in each of the large Northern ghettoes. President Johnson declared that such a step would lead to "many problems". How right he was! It was a step that would have smacked of permanent occupation of the ghettoes.

Housewives from Dearborn (a well-to-do and almost exclusively "lily-white" suburb of Detroit) soon found their own solution. Instructors taught young wives and elderly matrons to shoot

and a network of gun clubs sprang up across the country as white townspeople mastered the arts of self-defence and attack.

Blacks were intimidated not only by the police, national guardsmen and troops, but also by lynching mobs. The magazine *Life* reminded them that they were in a paltry minority in a country where every third household possesses a firearm, where people are accustomed to the use of firearms and where, moreover, there was a backlash among white citizens who could be aroused to fury by a threat to their property and high standard of living.

For its part, the White House, after the events in Detroit, proposed traditional means of cooling passions. Lyndon Johnson announced the setting up of a National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorders under the president. The president instructed the commission, which was headed by Otto Kerner, governor of Illinois, to elucidate what had happened and why and to suggest what could be done to prevent it from happening again.

Otto Kerner solemnly promised to "investigate the soul of America" and the commission plunged into its work, armed with a grant of 1.6 million dollars. A staff of consultants, lawyers, assistant and technical functionaries was hired and hundreds of interviews were conducted with rioters, witnesses of the riots, police chiefs, FBI agents, national-guard officers, governors, mayors and staff-members of various federal and local departments. Trips were made to the ghettoes, sometimes without warning and at night in order to avoid window-dressing by the authorities.

The widely-experienced members of the commission literally discovered America for themselves—the unfamiliar, black America—a fact which speaks volumes. "Most of the people of the country don't understand how serious things are," one declared, after coming to know this America. The reaction of another was even more expressive: "I am now convinced it is the most difficult, deap-seated problem of our century so far."

Johnson named eleven members to the commission, including two blacks—Roy Wilkins and Edward Brooke, the senator from Massachusetts. As the press later reported, the commission split not along colour lines but between liberals and conservatives. The former category numbered six, the latter five. Apart from the two blacks, the liberals included Otto Kerner, John Lindsay, who was appointed vice-chairman of the commission, Senator Fred Harris and Herbert Jenkins, the police chief of Atlanta. A more conservative position was taken by congressmen James Corman and William McCulloch, Charles Thornton, a large industrialist, I. W. Abel, president of the United Steel Workers and Katherine Peden of Kentucky.

The numerical superiority of the liberals and the weight of facts generally ensured their victory over the conservatives. When, after seven months of investigations, the commission transmitted its findings to the president and the press in the form of a stout volume, it proved a political bombshell. This detailed document and, in particular, its searching factual analysis of what happened in the summer of 1967 showed that, in extraordinary circumstances, bourgeois Ameri-

ca was capable of serious self-criticism. It may be called an historic document with the qualification, however, that the shock effect was short-lived—the report's warnings were not heeded and its recommendations remained unfulfilled.

"The American people face a national crisis which is dangerous, profound and far-reaching," *The New York Times* commented on the report. "Like the economic collapse after 1929, its effects are felt in every sphere of life and endanger everyone. Like a major war it has to be fought on many fronts and victory hangs in doubt... The nation is in crisis because its major cities are turning into Negro ghettoes as the whites flee to the suburbs."

The Kerner commission's report "rehabilitated" those thousands of black people who had stormily voiced their protest during the hot summer days of 1967 by proving that they had grounds for protest. The report was a powerful indictment of the American social system, which had given rise to racism. When he set up the commission President Johnson appeared with its members before the television cameras. When he received its report he refused to comment on it, thereby expressing his dissatisfaction.

The commission criticised the press for failing to understand the problems of the ghetto and for incorrectly describing them. It also criticised the police for excessive use of force, resulting in unjustified casualties.

What many blacks had been saying for a long time and what "respectable" politicians had dismissed as "radical nonsense" was now officially confirmed.

"This is our basic conclusion," the report stat-

said. "Our nation is moving towards two societies, one black, one white—separate and unequal.

"Reaction to last summer's disorders has quickened the movement and deepened the division. Discrimination and segregation have long permeated much of American life, they now threaten the future of every American."

After studying "the soul of America", the commission laid the principal blame for what had happened at the feet of white American racism.

"Segregation and poverty have created in the racial ghetto a destructive environment totally unknown to most white Americans," the report noted.

"What white Americans have never fully understood—but what the Negro can never forget—is that white society is deeply implicated in the ghetto. White institutions maintain it and white society condones it."

In answering the question "why this had happened", the report addressed itself to factors which nourished the "mood of violence" among the population of the ghettoes: "Despite these complexities, certain fundamental matters are clear. Of these, the most fundamental is the racial attitude and behaviour of white Americans towards black Americans."

"Race prejudice has shaped our history decisively; it now threatens to affect our future.

"White racism is essentially responsible for the explosive mixture which has been accumulating in our cities since the end of World War II."

In particular, the report contained a generalised portrait of the "typical rioter" distilled from hundreds of interviews with blacks in Newark

and Detroit. As one reads it, one realises how accurate and truthful the word-pictures of James Baldwin and Claude Brown were. They wrote of black Americans like these, although their heroes found on the streets of Newark and Detroit new forms of self-affirmation and protest.

The portrait of the "typical rioter" constitutes a unique page in contemporary American history. It is a "teen-ager or young adult, a lifelong resident of the city in which he rioted, a high school dropout; he was, nevertheless, somewhat better educated than his nonrioting Negro neighbour, and was usually underemployed or employed in a menial job. He was proud of his race, extremely hostile to both whites and middle-class Negroes and, although informed about politics, highly distrustful of the political system . . ."

Thus we have, in essence, the portrait of an untrained soldier in an army that has not yet been formed, who shows, however, a spontaneous class instinct, rejects the existing system, does not believe in the institutions of society, whether the president or the police, and is ready, even single-handedly, to declare war on this society.

That was how Claude Brown's "nigger" whom "no one understood" grew up. The new type of socially active black occupied a prominent position, evident to all, at the internal political crossroads of America. The "new black" hastened the polarisation of political forces and hardened the positions of other social figures, thus sweeping away vague intermediate shades.

Polarisation, of course, also occurred in the black liberation movement. The rioters of 1967

were without organisation or leaders but, voluntarily or involuntarily, they put into effect the desperate slogan of the extremists: "Burn, baby, burn!"

Black leaders responded to the events of the riotous summer in different ways. Martin Luther King, Philip Randolph, Roy Wilkins and Whitney Young issued a joint statement during the Detroit fires calling on blacks to act against "violence on the streets". Blacks, they wrote, "paid" for riots in killed, injured or imprisoned men and women, went hungry because neighbourhood shops had been burnt or pillaged, saw their children go without milk because deliveries were paralysed and were not paid because transport ceased to function or their places of work were destroyed. Blacks should not tolerate unemployment, bad housing, bad schools, insults, humiliations or attacks, the four authors noted; nevertheless, they condemned riots as a form of protest.

A different line was taken by radicals. Floyd McKissick, president of the Congress of Racial Equality, accused King, Randolph, Wilkins and Young of condemning "the violence of the victim". "History will likely record the explosions of this summer as the beginning of the black revolution," McKissick declared. "The criminal connotation of the term 'riots' will be erased. They will be recognized for what they are—rebellions against oppression and exploitation."

Stokely Carmichael, who was in Cuba when the events broke out, declared that the United States should be destroyed. His only dream, he said, was to live to see that day.

Rap Brown, Carmichael's successor as presi-

dent of the SNCC, gave his full support to the rioters. Bourgeois commentators and politicians joined hands in attacking him and Brown was arrested by the authorities of the state of Maryland on a charge of inciting to riot. This charge was never proved.

The Kerner commission's report was given almost unanimous approval by black leaders. Rap Brown, who, lacking $100,000 bail, was then being held in a New Orleans jail in connection with a Federal gun charge, commented with a mixture of satisfaction and irony that "the members of the commission should be put in jail under $100,000 bail each, because they're saying essentially what I've been saying".

At last America was on the road to the truth, Floyd McKissick said. Whites were finally admitting their racism and the time had come for general truths.

However, Martin Luther King added a note of scepticism to the chorus of satisfaction with the fact that the commission had named white racism as the true cause of the riots. In approving the commission's recommendation that 2 million jobs be created for blacks, King emphasised that similar recommendations had "been made before almost to the last detail and have been ignored almost to the last detail".

THE FINAL ACT IN MEMPHIS

It is time, however, to return to Martin Luther King who, the reader will recall, we left in August 1965 at the presidential signing of the Voting Rights Act which crowned the Selma cam-

paign. Our account of the ghetto riots has been prolonged, but necessary: King, after all, did not think of himself as an outsider in the historical struggle that millions of black Americans were waging, consciously or instinctively.

However big King was, he was, alas, no bigger than life, to recall an American expression. And no bigger than the cause to which he was linked.

Sometimes Martin Luther King directed events or, at any rate, was at the very centre of them—in Montgomery in 1955 and 1956, in Birmingham in 1963 and in Selma in 1965. But sometimes events cast him, impotent and helpless, into the background, as in the riotous summer of 1967, when thousands of angry, infuriated people forced their way on to centre stage, finding their place in history under the Kerner commission's generalised description as "typical rioters".

They have led me away from King, but only in order to place him in an historical perspective. This diminishes him by making him, despite his extraordinary qualities, only one of many, but also elevates him by showing the truly immense problems he tried to solve.

Martin Luther King was a simple and modest man in his private life, but he certainly did not underestimate his own importance on the public stage. On the contrary, he recognised his public significance and his mission. This is an essential quality in every major political leader, for, without an awareness of mission, a feeling of lofty responsibility is impossible. King himself stated frankly: "History has thrust me into this position. It would be both immoral and a sign

of ingratitude if I did not face my moral responsibility to do what I can in this struggle." Nevertheless, his relationship to the common cause was that of pupil to teacher, maturing with events and becoming absorbed by goals of ever increasing complexity.

And now let us return to where we left Martin Luther King—the president's room on Capitol Hill, August 6, 1965, where Abraham Lincoln's walnut table, covered with a green cloth, is lovingly preserved. How present-day US presidents are drawn to associate themselves with great predecessor! Lyndon Johnson had chosen this room and this day for their unique associations. He signed the act on voting rights with a battery of pens exactly 103 years after Lincoln had signed the Proclamation that emancipated the black slaves of America forcibly enlisted into the confederate army—and in the very same room. "Today is a triumph for freedom as huge as any victory on any battlefield," he declared. "Today we strike away the last major shackle of those fierce and ancient bonds."

A week before this ceremony the president had ordered an abrupt increase in the number of US troops in South Vietnam from 75,000 to 125,000. This was the largest increase—and the second escalation—of the war in the Vietnamese jungles since bombing of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam had commenced in February that year. Did Lyndon Johnson understand that associations with this week-old decision were more important that those with an event that had taken place a century previously or that, in stepping up the war in the jungles, he was placing new shackles on his "war against poverty"?

Martin Luther King again received a souvenir pen, but he was not carried away by the president's rhetoric. On a visit to the White House the previous day he had informed Lyndon Johnson that segregation in the North was increasing rather than diminishing. King had just returned from a trip to Chicago, Cleveland and Philadelphia, where he had been convinced yet again that the problems of de facto segregation in the North were no less acute than they were in the South. In Philadelphia, the "cradle of freedom", where the Declaration of Independence had been made on July 4, 1776, King had led a protest march to Girard College, a boarding school for poor orphans, which had not admitted a single black in 117 years. In Chicago 89.2 per cent of black schoolchildren attended segregated schools. Almost every day fighters for equality protesting against this statistic, marched to Chicago's City Hall, but Mayor Richard Daley did not want to replace his general superintendent of schools, the segregationist Benjamin Willis. And anyway the marches were very small.

At the end of July King tried his strength for the first time in the black districts of Chicago's West Side. Unlike the South, the church there was not the hub uniting the black community. The inhabitants of the ghetto were not attached to religion, nor did they hope for the promised land. King delivered his speech-sermons, not from church pulpits, but from trucks parked at intersections. However, thousands and thousands of people came to hear him speak, for here, too, he was known, loved and obeyed.

"We will change this city," King promised.

On July 26 he led a march of 15,000 people—

the largest march by blacks in Chicago's history.

But the city on Lake Michigan, where approximately one million blacks lived—more than in the state of Mississippi—had its own specific difficulties. Some of the local black leaders came to King in secret, bringing with them embarrassed apologies for their inability to help him. Others, dispensing with apologies and visits, declared the formation of their own "action" committee and let it be known that there was nothing for the Atlanta pastor to do in Chicago, that he was "not objective" and that black Chicagoans would manage their own affairs. The former were held back, the latter pushed forward by the same hand—the powerful, experienced hand of Mayor Richard Daley. This politician had been elected to the post of mayor three times and was unchallenged boss of the city's Democratic Party machine. Through the use of the carrot and the stick he had created a network of people loyal to him among local blacks, people who guaranteed him influence and electoral votes. Richard Daley had not laboured in order to see this entire edifice shaken by the outsider King. Unlike George Wallace, "Bull" Connor and Jim Clark in the South, the mayor of Chicago sympathised verbally with the blacks, accepted petitions, promised to review complaints favourably, but... King produced a penetrating characterisation of this type of Northern politician-bureaucrat: "Many of them sat on platforms... and showered praise on the heroism of Southern negroes. Yet when the issues were raised concerning local conditions only the language was polite: the rejection was firm and unequivocal."

After the July reconnaissance, it was decided that King's Southern Christian Leadership Conference should extend its efforts to the Northern ghettoes. The uprising in Watts in August 1965 reinforced King's resolution. Events were making speed vital. "If we don't get nonviolent groups, the alternative is Watts," he wrote in the magazine *New South*. "And, without other alternative, Watts will look like a Sunday School teaparty compared to what will happen."

Chicago was chosen as a test-ground.

In autumn, 1965, the first group of King's associates, led by James Bevel, settled in the Chicago slum area of Lawndale and began preparations for an extended operation. William Miller, King's biographer, tells of James Orange, a Birmingham clergyman, who was beaten up fifteen times: only then, having proved the firmness of his commitment to non-violence, did he win the respect of the young, black gang-members.

In the slums of Lawndale, a terrible district of decaying houses, mass unemployment and crime, lived 140,000 despairing impoverished people. King and his wife moved there in October 1965, taking a miserable little apartment in a house on Hamlin Avenue. The apartment was on the third floor and access was by way of an external wooden staircase. From the rickety balcony they could see a corner of "bloody" 16th Street, the home of drug-addicts, bandits and burglars.

This, too, was Chicago, lying on the border between the prairies and the Great Lakes, so magnificent when seen from the viewing-platform of the Prudential insurance company skyscraper, Chicago with its fashionable lakefront, its col-

lection of French Impressionist masterpieces in the city art gallery, its prosperous banks and declining abbattoirs and even its own black millionaires, who published *Ebony*, a black version of *Life*.

When King moved into the apartment on Hamlin Avenue the landlord, apprehensively recognising in his new tenant the black Moses and Nobel Peace Prize winner, hastened to send workmen to repair and redecorate the house and eliminate the most glaring infringements of the city housing-maintenance code. The landlords of Lawndale were gripped by anxiety, for King had made improvement of housing conditions and exposure of the extortionate practice of charging high prices for slum apartment his first objective. His aides tried out various methods as they felt their way towards a strategy in unfamiliar circumstances: rent boycotts, during which tenants refused to pay rent as a way of punishing landlords who failed to fulfil contractural conditions, and reverse strikes, whereby unemployed blacks repaired houses and footpaths voluntarily, their work being paid for out of funds resulting from rent boycotts.

The Chicago campaign continued intermittently throughout 1966 and the beginning of 1967.

On July 10, 1966, when 45,000 people took part in a march on City Hall, King proclaimed an extensive programme of demands upon the city authorities: complete integration and a doubling of the budget of public schools, improved public transport in the ghetto, distribution of municipal benefits in direct proportion to the population density of Chicago's different districts, the construction of new suburbs containing 10,000 low-rent municipal apartments and a pol-

:cy of emptying the slums by means of this construction.

The method of "direct action" tried and tested in the South required amendment in the North, where evasive opponents avoided open confrontation. Once King made use of the idea of Dick Gregory, a well-known black comedian and no less well-known militant struggler, who, in May 1965, had led a march from the slums to the house of Mayor Daley, who lived in a "lily-white" neighbourhood. On July 31, 1966 a column of blacks led by King crossed Ashland Avenue, which marked the border between black and white districts. Waiting for them was a determined crowd of racists, who had been harangued by Lincoln Rockwell, leader of the American nazis. Several people had even donned the robes of the Ku Klux Klan, which, in general, is not a feature of the Northern political landscape. The police kept the antagonists apart, but bricks and stones flew over their barriers, one hitting King.

The racists of the North were as unbending as those of the South.

In August, when the situation had become white-hot, the city authorities, business circles and the blacks concluded a compromise, nine-point agreement. King declared it a most important programme for eliminating discrimination in housing, but many did not agree with this optimistic assessment. The Chicago campaign was not a success. The slums had no difficulty in resisting the blows of the Union to End Slums, which had been set up by King's associates. The "slumlords"—slum property-owners—did not disappear. Mayor Daley remained

undisputed boss of the city's political machine and won re-election for a fourth term (his name flashed into the world's press in August 1968 in connection with the police bloodbath that followed an attempt by young people converging on Chicago to block the national Democratic Convention). Attempts to mobilise black voters against Daley failed.

... King usually spent three days of every week in Chicago. He did not forget his parishioners at the Ebenezer Church and, as always, he travelled widely. New problems changed the content of his speeches and he spoke more of the system of exploitation of blacks in the North than of civil rights in the South and of the billions of dollars that would be needed in the ghettoes to avoid a new Watts; he referred ever more frequently to Vietnam, where those billions were in fact being spent.

Pessimism was alien to him, but secretly he was perplexed. Amid the complex political and economic stratagems of the big cities the simple strike tactics which at meetings in Southern churches he had summed up with the call: "Brothers, put on your walking shoes and let's march for freedom!" were ineffective.

But, once, he did put aside the Chicago campaign and other affairs to fly South at short notice in order to put on his walking shoes and stop out under the blazing Mississippi sun together with his comrades of earlier marches. He learned how their paths had diverged and how far they were from each other.

James Meredith, the same James Meredith whose registration as a student at Ole Miss in 1962 had been ensured by President Kennedy

with the help of 16,000 troops, had also studied at Columbia University in New York and in distant Nigeria. In June 1966 he had decided to visit his native Mississippi and find out what progress had been made following the civil-rights acts of 1964 and 1965.

There was point to the name *Newsweek* magazine gave Meredith: a black Don Quixote. He preferred independent action and shunned organisations of every kind. In Mississippi he wanted to walk 350 kilometres alone along Highway 51, which runs from north to south across the state to Jackson, the capital.

Wearing a plaid shirt, striped trousers and walking shoes and carrying an abony cane given him by a tribal chief in Uganda, Meredith left Memphis, Tennessee, on June 6 and soon crossed the state border, passing a sign bearing the words "Welcome to Mississippi—the Magnolia State".

He was followed by six well-wishers, reporters avid for sensational news from Mississippi and several policemen.

The first day passed without incident, but the next day a man appeared from the undergrowth by the road with a gun.

"James! James!" the stranger shouted at the group of pilgrims. "James Meredith is the only one I want!"

The well-wishers, the reporters and the police prudently prostrated themselves on the road and the man fired three charges of birdshot at Meredith.

James Meredith fell to the ground, his head pouring blood. "Who is he? Who is he?" he groaned.

The reporters jumped to their feet and clicked their cameras, while the police arrested 40-year-old James Aubrey Norwell, an unemployed clerk from Memphis, who gave himself up without resistance. An ambulance was called and the wounded man was taken to a Memphis hospital.

Meredith's wounds proved superficial, but the photographs of the man lying on the concrete highway, his face distorted with pain, of his efforts to raise himself on arms suddenly grown weak, and of his eyes fixed on the faceless, nondescript clerk with a gun looking out of the bushes were not only photographs of a particular, suffering man, James Meredith, but also a symbol of the black American of 1966.

What was the difference between 1962, when Meredith had been admitted to Ole Miss at the cost of a national crisis, and 1966?

Later the black Don Quixote cried with impotence, humiliation and hate:

"He shot me like I was a goddam rabbit! And he took his own good time about it. If I'd had a gun, I could have got this guy . . ."

When he learned of the attack King immediately flew to the wounded man's bedside in Memphis. Stokely Carmichael, Floyd McKissick, Roy Wilkins and Whitney Young, the leaders of the five major black organisations, also flew to Memphis. The five men found it unacceptable that Norwell, emerging from the undergrowth by the road, could without difficulty stop a man wanting to measure progress in the South after hard years of struggle and sacrifice with a charge of birdshot. The idea of a mass march to Jackson following Meredith's route was conceived.

The five men had flown to Memphis to demon-

strate their unity, but profound splits were soon revealed. Differences came to the surface as soon as the five began to draw up a manifesto setting forth the aim of the march. (Meredith, after agreeing to the march, was taken to a New York hospital to recover, having been virtually thrown out of his Memphis hospital in a semi-conscious condition.)

Carmichael saw the march as an accusation and a challenge not only to Southern racists but also to the federal government. "We got to tell the Federal government about all those lies they have been telling us," the young Carmichael cried furiously. "When they needed Meredith they sent in Federal troops, but when they didn't need him, he was just a nigger in the cotton patch . . . We need power!"

Roy Wilkins defended the president. The word "manifesto" with its compromising associations with the Communist Manifesto frightened him.

King tried to achieve a compromise that would reconcile the disputants.

A manifesto was issued, although Wilkins did not sign it and also refused to participate in the march. The manifesto declared the march on Jackson to be "a massive public indictment and protest of the failure of American society, the government of the U.S. and the state of Mississippi" to ensure the civil rights enshrined in the acts of 1964 and 1965 and called on President Johnson to send federal referees to 600 Southern counties to speed up the registration of black voters and to approve the idea of a "freedom budget" allocating many thousands of millions of dollars to aid poor blacks.

The march to Jackson lasted three weeks. Like

a capricious river, it sometimes dwindled to hundreds before swelling to 15,000 participants on the final stage. There were few white marchers and the young blacks became increasingly implacable and intolerant. Throughout the march, especially in the evenings, when the column settled down for the night, King held discussions and sometimes entered into sharp exchanges with Carmichael and McKissick. At the age of 37 King had a look of paternal weariness and calm by comparison with the impulsive 24-year-old Carmichael. Like Meredith, Stokely Carmichael dreamed of guns and had lost all hope of curing the soul of white America. In five years of struggle he had been arrested 27 times. He had rejected the methods of non-violence and thirsted for revenge. His voice expressed with increasing loudness the views of young black radicals and extremists.

Carmichael argued for an "all-black" march, without "white bleeding-hearts and liberals". When the marchers passed through the Mississippi town of Greenwood where, two years previously, he had suffered at the hands of the racists and had led a "freedom school" at the risk of his life, he put forward the slogan "black power" for the first time.

"We call upon blacks not to go to Vietnam but to stay in Greenwood and fight here," Carmichael told a meeting in the city park to shouts of approval. "If they put one of us in jail, we will not post bail to free him. We shall go to the jail and free him ourselves."

Then one of his companions climbed on to the platform and shouted at the black crowd:

"What do we want?"

"Black power!" answered the crowd in unison. Carmichael's assistants had already spread the new slogan.

"What do we want?"

"Black power!" the young people responded still more loudly.

That evening a disturbed King spent five hours trying to persuade Carmichael and McKissick to drop this slogan, which he feared would provoke white America and harm the cause. Carmichael and McKissick remained adamant and rejected the compromise formulas. Carmichael said that he had deliberately tried out the new slogan during a march that was being followed by the whole country. He wanted the slogan to be heard immediately and admitted to King that he wanted to make him define his position publicly.

The march reached Jackson. King saw that young people were responding to Carmichael's slogan with greater enthusiasm than to his calls for non-violence.

After the march on Jackson a war of words broke out. Black leaders publicly abused each other. Roy Wilkins said that "black power" meant black racism and would lead to "black death". Vice-president Humphrey supported him. Floyd McKissick condemned Wilkins, saying that the latter did not know the mood of the blacks and that he, McKissick, did not want to be a white man and rejected the idea of integration into a society based on hard cash, injustice and oppression.

In a vain attempt to achieve unity King criticised both sides: the radicals, for hastily producing their slogan without clarifying it, and

the moderates, for failing to understand the reasons that gave rise to this slogan.

"The Negro is in dire need of a sense of dignity and a sense of pride, and I think black power is an attempt to develop pride," King said in an interview with the *New York Times*. "And there is no doubt about the need for power—he can't get into the mainstream of society without it.

"But the use of the phrase black power gives the feeling that Negroes can do it alone and that he doesn't need anybody but himself. We have to keep remembering that we are only 10 or 11 per cent of the population."

King rejected black nationalism and, even more emphatically, black racism both as a Christian priest and as a political realist. He had dreamed of the brotherhood of black and white all his life and he proclaimed this dream in his best-known speech, delivered on August 28, 1963, before the quarter of a million people who took part in the march on Washington and the whole of America. Calls for brotherhood formed the dominant note of his activity. "We must not lose faith in our white brothers," King said during the Selma campaign in the winter of 1965, after the murder of Jimmy Jackson. And whenever the racists tested the patience of the blacks by some fresh crime, some fresh outrage, driving them towards the final, fatal frontier of despair, King did everything he could to bring them back from this frontier through passionate calls for brotherhood. His strategy of non-violence, which presupposed the persuasion and re-education of the enemy by moral force and firmness, was based on a belief in the possibility of brotherhood.

King was both a clergyman, believing in the effectiveness of preaching brotherhood and love, and a leader with his own ideas concerning responsibility to the masses and political realism. From the leader's point of view, the idea of brotherhood was a practical necessity, dictated by circumstances. "The price our country must pay for continued oppression of the negro is its own destruction," King warned. "We must learn to live together as brothers or we will all perish as fools." He taught the blacks not to lose faith in their "white brothers", choosing for himself the role of a bridge across the chasm. But the chasm grew wider, its banks eroded by the rapid currents of distrust and hatred flowing from both sides.

On the march on Jackson, when "We Shall Overcome" thundered over Highway 51, King was disturbed to find that some of the singers had dropped the words "We shall overcome, black and white together". An alliance with the whites was rejected as having failed to vindicate itself. The late Malcolm X, shot down at a meeting, had once said: "If you are going to get yourself a 45 and start singing 'We shall overcome', I'm with you."

The number of young blacks who had lost all hope of a peacefully reconstructing America increased. King met these young blacks in Chicago, on the march to Jackson and in the Northern ghettoes. In Detroit in 1967 he, Wilkins, Young and Randolph called on blacks to refrain from violence. But then, in a letter to *The New York Times*, King, indicating that he could not fully express his standpoint in the declaration issued by the four, shifted his criticism to those

who incited violence—the American system, congress and the government of the United States. Yes, he wrote, there was blood on the hands of some blacks and they would pay the price exacted by society. But "what of the blood on the hands of a Congress that sneered at a modest bill to control the rats that daily bite babies in the ghettoes; that emasculated a Model Cities program; that killed rent subsidies; that, with Administration cooperation, is more than halving desperately needed anti-poverty programs? What shall be said of the white society that coldly stiffened its resistance to reforms?"

The slogan of "black power" symbolised the crisis in the methods of non-violent struggle ideologically; the upheavals in the ghetto symbolised the crisis in practical terms. As social forces became increasingly polarised, Martin Luther King assumed the proportions of a tragic figure.

"It is better to light a candle than to curse the darkness," states an American proverb. King refused to recognise hopeless situations and sought a solution to the problem not in a choice between the moderation of the black bourgeoisie, cut off from the mass of blacks, and the extremism of black nationalists, agitating for a guerrilla war in the ghettoes, but in the formula "militant non-violence", which set the more radical goal of mass civil disobedience. King began to speak of this method, which Gandhi had used against the British colonialists, in August 1967.

"Mass civil disobedience can use rage as a constructive and creative force," he declared.

Thus the bold idea of paralysing the great American cities by campaigns of civil disobedience was born. King considered that this had

at least two advantages over riots. Firstly, it was more effective, since such campaigns could be more prolonged and costly to society, although not so wantonly destructive. Secondly, the government would find it more difficult to suppress such campaigns by superior force.

In October 1967 King flew to Birmingham to serve a five-day prison sentence, passed earlier but postponed until now.

The idea of mass civil disobedience took concrete shape in the idea of a "poor people's" march on Washington of black and white, Mississippi and Alabama share-croppers, Chicano field-workers from California and unemployed white miners from the Appalachians—all the insulted and humiliated of America.

An army of poor people in direct confrontation with the federal authorities—that was the crown and culmination of King's political development. It was a path that proved a thorny one.

Before dwelling on this march in more detail, we must turn our attention to another public cause which reflected the evolution of the Baptist clergyman from Atlanta—his anti-war struggle.

War has been mentioned only in passing in our narrative, but from the beginning of 1965 the political, moral and economic atmosphere of the United States had been electrified by the war in Vietnam. This became increasingly the case with the passage of time. The war taught a lesson which increasing numbers of blacks learned: the cruel machine of US imperialism which was operating in the jungles of Vietnam was the same machine that operated in the black ghettoes of the United States. The Kerner commission dis-

covered that more than half the black rioters it questioned considered that the country which treated them like an evil stepmother was not worthy of defence in the event of war.

The war in Vietnam diverted not only the financial resources but also the social energy and attention of the United States. The black problem—one of the country's most important internal problems—seemed, psychologically, less pressing. The forces of protest against the war grew, but the honest white Americans who were part of the protest were less active in their participation in the movement for equal rights than they had been in, for example, 1963-1964. In their turn, moderate black leaders kept blacks out of the anti-war protest. "We have enough Vietnams in Alabama," Roy Wilkins said in justification of this tactic.

Dr King's anti-war standpoint stemmed, naturally, from his pacifism as a clergyman and a proponent of non-violence. He considered that, in the nuclear age, the true choice in international relations was not between violence and non-violence but between non-violence and non-existence. As early as August 1965, at the time of Johnson's first escalations of the war in Vietnam, the Southern Christian Leadership Conference had, at King's initiative, adopted a resolution demanding an end to the bloodshed and war in Vietnam, while its leader had spoken out in favour of an immediate cessation to the bombing of the DRV.

At the same time, however, he held back from active participation in protests against the war. His wife, Coretta, could be seen at anti-war meetings, but King himself did not attend. It was in late 1966 and especially early 1967 that King

threw his moral weight and energy whole-heartedly into the anti-war struggle.

On April 4, 1967, King delivered a programme speech at the Riverside Church in New York City. His speech aroused a wide response.

The meeting in this majestically gloomy skyscraper church on the high bank of the Hudson in Upper Manhattan had been called by an anti-war organisation of clergy.

King appeared first below, on the basement floor, where there were rooms for guests and conferences. Was he being guarded? Apparently, yes. At any rate, our credentials were checked at the door to the room where King was waiting for the meeting to begin. I saw him close-up then for the first time: a short, thickset man in a heavy black suit. He had an inner formality which precluded familiarity and the sort of backslapping so loved in the United States. He was conscious of his lofty mission. Words came easily to this fine orator, but did not thereby lose their weight, for each word was honest and had been won through much suffering; with each word King committed himself. The glances at King in the church on Riverside Drive were special. This was the leader of hundreds of thousands of people, a man who was trusted by millions.

I remember the special inner lift, the special glances from the audience in the pews when he appeared at the rostrum.

His speech was as solemn as a vow and as open as a confession.

"A time comes when silence is betrayal," he began. "That time has come for us in relation to Viet Nam . . .

"Over the past two years as I have moved to break the betrayal of my own silences and to speak from the burnings of my own heart, as I have called for radical departures from the destruction of Viet Nam, many persons have questioned me about the wisdom of my path. At the heart of their concerns this query has often loomed large and loud: Why are *you* speaking about the war, Dr King? Why are *you* joining the voices of dissent? Peace and civil rights don't mix, they say. Aren't you hurting the cause of your people, they ask. And when I hear them, though I often understand the source of their concern, I am nevertheless greatly saddened, for such questions mean that the inquirers have not really known me, my commitment or my calling. Indeed, their questions suggest that they do not know the world in which we live."

He explained how inseparably the struggle against the war and the struggle for equality were linked.

"A few years ago there was a shining moment in that struggle. It seemed as if there was a real promise of hope for the poor—both black and white—through the poverty program. There were experiments, hopes, new beginnings. Then came the build-up in Viet Nam and I watched the program broken and eviscerated as if it were some idle political plaything of a society gone mad on war, and I knew that America would never invest the necessary funds or energies in rehabilitation of its poor so long as adventures like Viet Nam continued to draw men and skills and money like some demonic destructive suction tube.

"We were taking the black young men who

had been crippled by our society and sending them 8,000 miles away to guarantee liberties in Southeast Asia which they had not found in Southwest Georgia and East Harlem. So we have been repeatedly faced with the cruel irony of watching negro and white boys on TV screens as they kill and die together for a nation that has been unable to seat them together in the same schools. So we watch them in brutal solidarity burning the huts of a poor village but we realise that they would never live on the same block in Chicago."

As a struggler for social and racial equality and a penetrating critic, he considered the US war in Vietnam a symptom of a deeper disease and warned that "a nation that continues year after year to spend more money on military defence than on programs of social uplift is approaching spiritual death".

His speech met with an ovation that continued as he left the hall. Martin Luther King was, perhaps, the US anti-war movement's most valuable acquisition, a magnet to the masses.

In the middle of April 1967 the stocky figure of Dr King was seen for the first time beside the lanky figure of Dr Spock in a march on Fifth Avenue in New York City. This was an anti-war march of unprecedented size in which more than 200,000 people participated.

I was not in New York on that day, but in the conservative state of Arizona, the state that gave America Senator Barry Goldwater, and I was able there to see the irritation and the open anger of the provinces. The local newspapers attacked King as a "traitor".

Civil fearlessness is a rarer and higher quality

than physical fearlessness. King knew the fire he would draw on himself when he came out openly against the war. For official America and for the White House he became persona non grata. Anti-war radicalism was repugnant to many of his liberal bourgeois adherents and donations to his organisation dropped sharply, many letters requesting material assistance being returned demonstratively unopened. Finally, the danger of attempts on his life increased amid the atmosphere of newspaper persecution and ostracism, for the stream of published abuse encouraged the extremists, the criminals and the assassins. Did he know this? Of course. But his opposition to the war was dictated by conscience and civic duty, by an awareness of his responsibility to the black liberation movement. King was not accustomed to retreat from questions of principle.

Here is part of an address he delivered:

"The war has so increased Negro frustration and despair that urban outbreaks are now an ugly feature of the American scene. How can the administration with quivering anger denounce the violence of ghetto Negroes when it has given an example of violence in Asia that shocks the world. The users of naval guns, millions of tons of bombs, and revolting napalm cannot speak to Negroes about violence . . .

"I do not want to be misunderstood. I am not equating the so-called Negro violence with the war. The acts of Negroes are infinitely less dangerous and immoral than the deliberate acts of escalation of the war. In fact the Negroes . . . have destroyed property, but even in the grip of rage the vast majority have vented their anger

on inanimate things, not people. If destruction of property is deplorable, what is the word for use of napalm on people."

Those words were spoken in Chicago in November 1967. King had flown there for an anti-war conference of labour activists in order to support them and condemn the majority of trade unions, which openly or tacitly backed US aggression in Vietnam. The organised labour movement of the United States was kept in check by the reactionary leadership of the AFL-CIO and declined to take an active part in the anti-war struggle, just as it declined, with the exception of a few trade unions, to participate in the struggle for equal rights. Lyndon Johnson knew that, whenever he escalated the war, he would probably receive more support from George Meany, the former plumber and president of the AFL-CIO, than from the hereditary billionaire Nelson Rockefeller.

"One voice was missing—the loud, clear voice of labor," King said with bitterness, referring to trade-union inactivity. "The absence of that one voice was all the more tragic because it may be the decisive one for tipping the balance towards peace."

His words met with an ovation, for his audience, too, was concerned by the absence of this voice.

The conference was held in a building of the Chicago University. As the guest of honour King spoke after lunch. Once again, as in the skyscraper church on Riverside Drive, I was struck by the unusual solemnity and the atmosphere of respectful, undivided attention that ensued as soon as Martin Luther King rose to speak. I could

see that many of those present seemed to feel the vengeful fingers of George Meaney at their throats. In coming to an anti-war conference these officials were risking their careers, for the rank-and-file members of their trade unions were out of sympathy with them and the ultra-patriots could settle accounts with them when they returned by ejecting them from their posts. In general, their challenge to the AFL-CIO leadership was a timid one.

King, sensitive to his audiences, understood that these people needed moral support. At the end of his speech he departed from the text distributed to correspondents and spoke slowly, harshly and angrily of the friends who had warned him and the enemies who had baited him when he had begun to speak out against the dirty war. He spoke of politicians who justified baseness and compromise by considerations of practical expediency.

There were moments, he said, when a man had to state frankly where he stood, whether others liked his position or not. One's popularity might be reduced, but there were principles that were above everything and departure from them was equivalent to moral suicide.

As in the church on Riverside Drive, these words had the ring both of a confession and a pledge. He vowed not to retreat and to inspire others by his example. He had the hypnotic inner freedom of a person who has consciously chosen a path in life ruling out compromise with conscience.

The Chicago speech was delivered a few weeks before Senator Eugene McCarthy, scorning considerations of career, openly challenged Lyndon

Johnson and the leadership of the Democratic Party by declaring that he would run for the presidency as an opponent of the war in Vietnam. Months later, Senator Robert Kennedy, timidly glancing over his shoulder at the White House and calculatingly weighing up the gains and losses that would result from every step, also decided to oppose Johnson.

The clergyman from Atlanta did, indeed, know how to see the world and learn from life. How far he travelled between December 1955 and April 1968, when an assassin's bullet ended for ever the evolution of Martin Luther King's social and political views and activity!

What was the difference between the initial and the final aims of the struggle, between the initial and the final opponents? A worthy place in the buses for the black citizens of Montgomery—and a worthy place under the sun for the poor people of America, white and black. Struggle against the humiliating notices "Coloureds only"—and principled opposition to the internal and external policy of the United States, for King eventually saw nothing less than transformation of the structure of racist imperialism from within as his goal.

And his opponents? "Tacky" Gayle, the mayor of Montgomery, "Bull" Connor, Birmingham's commissioner for public safety, sheriff Jim Clark —and President Lyndon Johnson of the United States, with whom the Nobel prize-winner severed both political and personal ties during the last months of his life.

The last legislative act King and his followers wanted to wrest from congress and the president was an act on economic rights, which would have

guaranteed poor Americans work and a living wage.

King's last campaign was directed not at a boycott of the shops of Birmingham or at bringing pressure to bear on the racists of Selma, who refused to register black voters, but at paralysing the entire governmental machinery of Washington for weeks and possibly months, thereby forcing it to change the priorities of government spending.

From autumn, 1967, the Atlanta headquarters of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference was engaged in preparing the poor people's march. The operation was drawn up in broad outline. Three thousand activists, the vanguard of the protest army, were to converge on the capital from various states and erect a Hooverville of shacks and tents that would be impossible to ignore by the neo-classical departments and offices of Washington. Queues of sick people without money for treatment were to form at the hospitals. Sit-ins were to be organised in government institutions.

Pickets and deputations were to disrupt the soulless functioning of the bureaucratic machine, forcing the federal authorities to respond under dramatic circumstances to the cry: do poor people in America, in fact, have the right to "jobs and wages"?

A special questionnaire distributed to activists proposed an answer to the question—why would you disrupt or dislocate Washington, D.C.?—because poor people's lives are disrupted and dislocated every day, and we want to put a stop to this.

King regarded the poor people's march as the

last desperate test of non-violence, an attempt to direct, accumulating fury and hatred into the channel of constructive protest. Failure would open the way to rioting in the ghettoes. He did not count on an easy victory: on the contrary, the resistance of America's ruling circles had grown infinitely more stubborn now that the struggle meant that "the privileged groups will have to give up some of their billions".

US capitalism was being threatened in its political citadel, a fact which did not escape clear-sighted observers. The writer and journalist José Yglésias, who spent many days in the cramped rooms of King's Atlanta headquarters, summed up his impressions thus: "The tactics are nonviolent and the tone of the language in S.C.L.C. literature is moral, but the substance of the demands is revolutionary for America: class demands dramatically expressed through other than orderly democratic process."

Yglésias asked King to confirm this conclusion. King replied: "In a sense, you could say we are engaged in the class struggle, yes... It will be a long and difficult struggle, for our program calls for a redistribution of economic power."

King continued by discussing the Biblical parable of the beggar Lazarus and the rich man. Lazarus had not gone to heaven simply because he was poor, King argued, nor the rich man to hell because he was rich. "No, the rich man was punished because he passed Lazarus every day and did not see him." King concluded: "And I tell you if this country does not see its poor—if it lets them remain in their poverty and misery —it will surely go to hell!"

This was the mature King, a man whose revolutionary views were clothed in the passion of an evangelist. A preacher of universal love and brotherhood, who distinguished among his brothers and spoke of poor people in the first person as "we".

Four days after his assassination Coretta King said at a memorial meeting: "He gave his life for the poor of the world—the garbage workers of Memphis and the peasants of Vietnam".

He proved the truth of those words by the course of his life and struggle and by his death.

Where would he have gone had he lived longer?

Twelve years of struggle had flown rapidly past. The thirteenth year, the last, had come. Each campaign seemed decisive, but his great dream was like a dazzling mountain top, glittering in the sun and leading him on—so close, so solid, so infinitely vivid—and so inaccessible.

"The day of Martin Luther King has come to an end," commented the cynical black congressman from Harlem Adam Clayton Powell, an adroit demagogue and lover of high living. He was not alone, but King himself believed that the most important chapter of his life was still incomplete: he continued to prepare for the confrontation in Washington, refusing to rest.

In the complex kaleidoscope of his moods weariness was beginning to appear. A political leader has no right to despondency and pessimism, but King the man was subject to painful insights.

America is sick, he admitted to a friend. The disease, he said, was much more deeply-seated than he had supposed.

The end of March 1968 saw a lull on the American racial front.

Everyone awaited April 22—the beginning of the Washington confrontation.

A strike was in progress only in Memphis, Tennessee, organised by the city's garbage collectors.

Tennessee is the door to the South. Memphis is a city on the Mississippi with 550,000 inhabitants, 40 per cent of whom—over 200,000—are black.

It is a city like any other. There are "Southern traditions", but the white masters of Memphis produce typical examples of "improvement" —a sprinkling of blacks, even in the police force, thirteen blacks on the city council, public schools desegregated as early as 1961 and, mark you, with no trouble.

As they do everywhere, the blacks complain of low wages, unemployment, poor housing and the police, which "never misses an opportunity to bash a black head with a club or to fire at a black body".

Street-cleaning is dirty work and as a rule it is done by black Americans hired by the city council. In Memphis their ultimate boss was the mayor, Henry Loeb. The 1,300 strikers demanded wage rises and official recognition of their trade union. Under the labour code, trade union recognition was very important, for it meant that no one could be hired or fired without the union's agreement, while strike-breakers were placed outside the law.

This modest strike, knowledge of which was confined to Memphis, continued for more than

forty days without visible prospects of success. Firemen were called out more frequently than usual as people sought to dispose of mounting piles of rubbish by burning it.

So long as the strike did not attract the attention of Dr King it caused the authorities little trouble. However, when King arrived in Memphis he declared a march of solidarity—a by no means superfluous rehearsal for the Washington battle, incidentally. King followed his traditional method of dramatising the situation and forging "creative tension" in the city with the aim of frightening the authorities and obliging them to negotiate and make concessions.

On March 28, a week before the fatal shooting, the peace of Memphis was broken by a march of protest and solidarity.

From morning onwards thousands of people walked along Beale Street, past pawn-shops and cheap stores. At their head was King, arm in arm with Ralph Abernathy and Ralph Jackson.

Ahead and to either side of them were policemen, clubs at the ready, Colts in open holsters on their hips, walkie-talkies with needle-like aerials. Large crash-helmets, leggings, number-badges pinned to their shirts.

The Memphis police were powerfully-built and colourful, like all American guardians of public order. Protectors of marches. Witnesses of marches. Scourges of marches. They paced alongside the marchers like cocked triggers, raking them with their eyes. They were waiting for their nervous, sharp-shooting moment of turmoil.

And it came.

Where had they come from, these nimble and intrepid black teenagers? From Hamilton High

School. They had cut classes and wanted to join the marchers, but the policemen accompanying the marchers were like a convoy guard—there was no room in the column for outsiders.

A gust of wind seemed to blow over Beale Street, where the black jazz musician W. C. Handy had once composed his popular blues. But this was not the sweet melancholy of the blues—it was a mad tap-dance.

Bricks were thrown at policemen and shop-windows, broken glass showered and here and there hands were hastily thrust between jagged shards to grab goods from windows.

Hooliganism? Revenge? Or the brief, unthinking intoxication of young people gripped by the deceptive idea that for a moment Beale Street belonged to them with its white shops and pawnbrokers—surely it must belong to them if there were so many black people around?

The cops threw themselves into this dance, this smoking, lethal twist, which is so often thumped out on the streets of the ghetto. Oh, those distorted bodies, dislocated by fear, twisting away from the whistling clubs! Oh, the trembling and sweating in front of the barrel of a Colt! Oh, the curtain of tears on faces wreathed with the smoke of tear-gas grenades!

The next day Earl Lunning, Chairman of the Insurance Council of Memphis, announced that the shop-windows of 155 stores had been smashed and that looters had entered five per cent of them. Statistics issued by the police listed a 16-year-old black killed, 60 people injured and 200 arrests.

The legislative assembly of Tennessee reacted swiftly, in the manner to be expected of people

frightened by the prospect of yet another "long hot summer", which had suddenly begun in early spring. Mayors were given permission to introduce a curfew and Henry Loeb was the first to take advantage of this. From 7 pm on March 28 the streets of Memphis were deserted. Their emptiness was guaranteed by 4,000 national guardsmen who had been rapidly dispatched to the city by Buford Ellington, the state governor. A further 8,000 soldiers were placed in a state of readiness.

White Memphis had taken measures to counter a black uprising. But the explosion never came.

And the march was broken up. As soon as rocks and clubs began to fly King was bundled into a car and driven away to an unknown destination. He was protected both by his friends and by the Memphis authorities, who feared that if anything happened to King an explosion would be inevitable.

King had not expected the insane tap-dance on Beale Street.

"If I had known there was a possibility of violence yesterday, I would not have had that particular march," he said.

On March 29 the striking garbage collectors set up pickets. They marched in a long, thin line beneath the warm Southern sun, surrounded by another line, equally long and thin but unmoving, of national guardsmen with unslung rifles. The shadows of bayonets stabbed the placards on the picketers' chests. The message of the placards was spelled out to the soldiers in large letters: "I am a person".

However, the cries of outrage that were heard

did not concern the humanity of the Memphis garbage collector, but were directed at the black anarchy which had emerged once more in Memphis and which it was time—high time!—to put a stop to. Angry veins swelled on Washington's forehead. Robert Byrd, the senator from West Virginia, proposed banning the poor people's march on the capital by court order. Byrd attacked King as, supposedly, lacking real support and criticised his plans which could, he claimed, bring to Washington "the same kind of violence, destruction, looting and bloodshed". Even Edward Brooke, the only black senator, publicly expressed doubt that King could keep the Washington campaign within the bounds of non-violence. Any spark could cause an explosion in the "inflammable conditions" of Washington and who, Brooke asked, could guarantee that such a spark would not be struck among participants in a mass march? President Johnson himself, in three separate speeches on March 29, warned that he would not tolerate "mindless violence" and called upon the forces of law to act firmly and fearlessly, promising federal assistance if it were needed.

Once again, some wanted to bring down King's slogan of "jobs and wages" by that of "law and order". The white backlash was making itself felt in a country that had not forgotten the riots of the previous year. The dominant mood was quite definite: the time for pampering the ungrateful blacks was past—now it was time to put them in their place. The press carried frequent reports of factories filling urgent orders from the authorities for armoured cars and the miraculous Mace gas, which upset the mental balance of

the "rioter", as well as of other preparations for the latest "long hot summer". The latter was awaited as something inevitable.

A comparison illustrates these moods. In November 1963, when Lyndon Johnson appeared for the first time before congress as president a few days after the assassination of John Kennedy, he received most applause for his mention of the civil-rights bill, the unfulfilled legacy of the slain president. But as early as January 1968, when Johnson delivered his traditional State of the Union message, the longest applause from the politicians greeted his remarks on measures against "crime on the streets". Not for nothing was this eloquent applause seen as an anti-black demonstration on the part of the federal authorities.

The shadow of the Memphis episode now lay on the Washington march and retreat would doom it beyond recall.

"We are fully determined to go to Washington," King declared on March 29. "We feel it is an absolute necessity."

He also went on the attack in Memphis, calling a second march of solidarity with the garbage collectors to demonstrate to critics and those hostile to him that he could guarantee a peaceful procession.

The next march was planned to take place within a few days. King once again flew from Atlanta to Memphis.

And the march took place—peacefully, just as King had dreamed. It was larger than he could have anticipated—33,000 people, black and white, converged from all parts of the country, as in the heroic days of the march on Montgomery

and during the historic march on Washington. They marched solemnly through the streets and white Memphis seemed to fade out of sight. There were no aggressive racist crowds, the police did not shout at the marchers. Locks hung on shop doors, show-windows were covered with iron grilles and no one looked out of windows by order of the police. The only spectators of this march were national guardsmen, standing immobile on the pavements.

The marchers moved in ranks of eight between the tense gaze of soldiers, holding thousands of placards bearing the same message: "Honor King—End Racism!" In the front rank, just as on March 28, marched Ralph Abernathy and Ralph Jackson. But a familiar, resolute, solemn figure was not with them. Martin Luther King lay in his grave in his home city of Atlanta. The marchers were led by Coretta King. During those bitter days she did more than accept condolences: she also spoke at her husband's funeral. Her voice trembled and there were painful moments of total silence whenever Coretta faltered, struggling with her tears and collecting her strength to go on with the speech. Her anguish was evident, but there were no tears. She was like King and knew that even a funeral should also be an act, that he would have wanted a funeral that did not interrupt the struggle.

The march of solidarity with the garbage collectors which King had prepared became a march in his memory and took place on April 8, four days after his murder.

But the garbage collectors of Memphis were not forgotten. On April 16 they gained victory.

Theirs was King's final victory, for which he paid with his life.

But let us return to our story, which is now fast drawing to a close.

On April 3 King flew back to Memphis, not knowing that he was flying to his death.

He was late in leaving Atlanta. Before take-off the pilot apologised to the passengers over the aircraft's public-address system:

"Ladies and gentlemen, I want to apologize for the delay. But today we have on board Dr Martin Luther King, Jr., and we have to be very careful—we had the plane guarded all night— and we have been checking people's luggage."

The announcement was in no way remarkable. And it was made not for Dr King and his companions, of course, but for the other passengers: they might include people who were disturbed rather than flattered by flying with such a renowned figure. His company in the air was not without its dangers and aircraft were, as a rule, checked with bomb-detectors if the name of Dr Martin Luther King Jr. appeared on the passenger list. To avoid the risk of leaving their four children orphans he and Coretta never flew in the same aircraft.

On the evening of April 3 King delivered a sermon at a black church in Memphis. Recalling the pilot's announcement, he reflected on the problem of life and death:

"And then I got into Memphis. And some began to talk about the threats that were out, of what would happen to me from some of our sick white brothers. Well, I don't know what will happen now. We've got some difficult days ahead . . .

Like anybody else, I would like to live a long life. Longevity has its place. But I'm not concerned about that now. I just want to do God's will. And He's allowed me to go up to the mountain. And I've looked over, and I've seen the Promised Land.

"I may not get there with you, but I want you to know tonight that we as a people will get to the Promised Land.

"So I'm happy tonight. I'm not worried about anything. I'm not fearing any man..."

Was he troubled by a strange premonition? If so, it was for the last but certainly not the first time. He was threatened with death almost every day—in letters, in shouts from crowds, in anonymous telephone-calls—and he had a propensity to reflect aloud on the possibilities of premature death. In these reflections flights of religious mysticism were mingled with political realism, for he knew the country in which he led the dangerous life of a struggler. But that was the only way he could live and so he had long been prepared: his fatalism was not an affectation but the sober recognition of a constant, real threat. "I've solved the problem of personal danger," he observed once. "I live every day with the threat of death, and I came to see many years ago that I couldn't function if I allowed fear to overcome me." And so he preferred to talk about death, not about courage—that went without saying.

Knowing King's custom of staying, where possible, in black districts and at hotels owned by blacks, his friends had taken a room for him at the cheap Lorraine Motel, No. 306 on the second floor. The door opened on to a long balcony with

a green railing. To go downstairs one had to walk along the balcony to the staircase.

It was to room No. 306 at the Lorraine Motel that King returned after speaking at the black church.

He spent the day in his room, busy with his various concerns. Memphis was taking valuable time away from preparations for the Washington confrontation. Moreover, the situation had become more complicated, for the Memphis authorities were trying to obtain a court order banning the second march.

King was in conference with his assistants at the motel all day. He had been invited for supper to the home of Samuel Kyles, a black clergyman, and at 6 o'clock discussion had to be broken off. Kyles had already arrived and was waiting to take them to his home. Ralph Abernathy was still in King's room. King knotted a black tie with a gold stripe round his powerful neck, looking into the mirror and teasing Kyles.

"I think your wife is too young to cook soul food for us," he said. "She's only thirty-one, isn't she? How can she cook soul food at that age?"

In fact, King was himself a young man—but only in years.

Abernathy joined in. "That's right. We don't want to come over to your house and get filet-mignon. We want greens, soul food. Does Gwen know how to cook soul food?"

"Don't you worry," Kyles assured them, knowing that they were not merely joking.

King lived modestly and extravagance, even in food, seemed to him a deception of those who followed him and believed in him.

(When, after King's assassination, the most important political figures of the United States hastened with condolences to his Atlanta home, they were struck by the modesty of his dwelling. A short note in the newspapers carried the news that King's family had been left with only 5.000 dollars in savings, a trifling sum by American standards, which says more about the man than emotional obituaries, for it provides posthumous confirmation of a rare unity of word and deed. One must know the United States, where adherence to any social cause, even a just one, does not prevent bourgeois politicians from growing rich, in order properly to appreciate this lack of self-interest, one of the features of King's greatness.)

At last King had knotted his tie satisfactorily and he and Kyles left the room. Kyles went downstairs, but King lingered by the green rail of the balcony, waiting for Abernathy, who had still not emerged.

It was 6 pm.

His premonitions had evidently left him at the last moment and King did not glance at the sunlit eastern wall of a two-storey house on Mulberry Street. He looked down at his companions on the street, who were ready to leave.

A black Cadillac was parked by the balcony. It had been made available for King's use by the proprietor of a black funeral home in Memphis. Beside the Cadillac waited King's friends Jesse Jackson and Andrew Young and the chauffeur Solomon Jones. All were in the mood for soul food, conversation and jokes. After supper they were to attend a late meeting.

"Do you know Ben?" Jackson called to King,

indicating Ben Branch, a black Chicago musician who was to play and sing at the meeting.

"Yes, that's my man!" King smiled, leaning on the rail. "Be sure to sing, 'Precious Lord, Take My Hand' for me tonight, Ben. Sing it real pretty."

Branch said that he would. He knew the sad spiritual.

"It's getting chilly, Dr King," said the chauffeur. "Better take an overcoat."

"O.K., I will," King replied and leaned slightly forward, as if stretching out to these people, who were dear to him, who loved and protected him, who were proud of him and who fussed over him as they did over senior, respected, wise comrades.

He leaned slightly forward, holding the green railing, and at that moment he was struck by a bullet. His friends heard the sound of a shot and the mortal force of nine grammes of flying lead knocked over his thickset figure. Throwing out his arms, King collapsed backwards on to the cement floor of the balcony. Blood poured from his neck. A first-class murderer had brought him down. The bullet had entered the right side of his neck, smashing the cervical vertebrae. He looked with wide-open, almond-shaped eyes at Abernathy, who ran out of room No. 306.

Clinical death ensued an hour later, but he parted with life at the moment when the bullet felled him and his friends rushed on to the balcony; surrounding his prostrate body, they lifted their arms a little to the right, in the direction of the sunlit wall from which had come the sound of the shot.

The howl of police cars could already be heard. Cameras were already clicking and cine-cameras already whirring, but an ambulance had not yet come and he still lay on his back, his knees bent, his arms thrown out, in his black suit, his face covered by a white towel and his blood flowing on to the cement floor by his head . . .

"Precious Lord, take my hand, lead me, let me withstand, I am tired, I am weak, exhausted. Lead me through the storm and the night to the light, precious Lord."

* * *

Grief does, indeed, have swift feet, especially in the age of television. On that evening of shock and mourning America seemed to me like a person perpetually in a flurry of activity suddenly confronted by a menacing, irrefutable judge, who shook it by the neck, scattering everyday distractions to the winds and cried: "Look into your soul! Surely you can see what is happening there?"

And yet millions, entire millions of people—who would dare deny it?—experienced a vengeful joy, a satisfied malice: at last this tedious troublemaker, this nigger who wanted more than the others, had got what was coming to him. But this malice was kept for members of the domestic circle and for remarks to drinking companions seated on high stools by the bar. At first, even the racist press paid Martin Luther King the tribute of silence or fine words accorded to the dead. Hatred disappeared underground to celebrate in secret; but there were many who woke the next morning in good spirits, not because an April weekend was before them with a picnic in

the countryside and the leisurely ritual of mowing the lawn in the warm spring sun and the noise of their children, but because their world had become calmer and more spacious following the disappearance of the Atlanta clergyman.

And what an unexpected and pleasant surprise this, no doubt, was for the anonymous caller who had telephoned Coretta King in the evening of January 30, 1956, when the smoke from the first bomb thrown at the King house had still not cleared. "Yes, I did it," the voice cried, choking with hate. "And I'm very sorry I didn't kill you all, you mongrels."

It was noted that President Johnson's eyes were moist. Whatever his relations with King had been, the Memphis tragedy shook him as a man and as president. The reputation of the country had, it seemed, been shattered. Lady Bird, his wife, volunteered to fly to Texas to act as guide to a group of West European newspaper editors, invited to the United States under a programme called, by malicious fortune, "Discover America".

In the White House apprehensions outweighed grief. What would be the response from the ghettoes? It was not hard to guess. Preventing or at least moderating the response would, however, be more difficult. The president hurried before the television cameras to call upon Americans to reject the blind violence which had struck down Dr King, who lived by non-violence. That was how ruling America found the balm it needed—in the words violence and non-violence. Violence —non-violence... The words were heard millions of times over the air and on television, they were repeated endlessly in newspaper like

an invocation. Like shamans, journalists and politicians tried to charm away the intolerable pain of black Americans.

But the authorities knew the weaknesses of verbal therapy. First to take action were Henry Loeb, the mayor of Memphis, and Buford Ellington, the governor of Tennessee. Doctors recorded King's death at 7.05 pm, Memphis time, but Loeb had already introduced a curfew in the city thirty minutes before. Governor Ellington began his television address with an expression of condolence, but concluded with an announcement that 4,000 national guardsmen, withdrawn, as ill luck would have it, only the previous day, would be returned to Memphis. National-guard aircraft were already transferring police trained in riot suppression. The Lorraine Motel was cordoned off, the area having become dangerous, attracting blacks like a magnet to express their grief through anger. Grief and anger swept from the streets into the houses, smashing and hacking. At night police cars were fired on from the roofs. Two policemen were slightly wounded and received treatment at the same hospital in which King's body had lain.

Official mourning was mingled with fear—black mourning, with the fury of impotence. I recall a meeting hastily called in New York's Central Park on the Friday after King's death. The accusations levelled were angry, but how was King to be avenged? How was this stepmother country to be given a good lesson? Thousands of people moved down Broadway towards City Hall.

On Friday morning Stokely Carmichael called a press-conference in Washington. On North-

West 14th Street, where the walls of buildings were already plastered with mourning portraits of "the apostle of non-violence", impetuous knots of blacks were already electric with tension and the first bricks were flying at the windows of white-owned shops. Stokely Carmichael believed that the moment had come. His words stretched like a fuse to the dynamite of 14th Street, to the capital's half-million blacks. The press-conference was no exchange of questions and answers, no chat with correspondents, but a call to action that bubbled with hate.

When white America killed Dr King it had declared war on the blacks, Carmichael declared. The uprisings that were occurring at that moment in the country's cities were insignificant by comparison with what was about to happen. Blacks had to take revenge for the death of their leaders. They would repay their debts not in the courts but in the streets. White America had still to pay for killing Dr King. The black people knew that it had to get a gun. Every day blacks were dying in Vietnam. They should take as many whites as they could with them to the next world.

Carmichael's furious off-the-cuff remarks frightened many. "Get a gun"—those words were feared most of all. During the mourning period both official America and the majority of black leaders tried to influence blacks against resorting to violence. Even activists of the Congress of Racial Equality, themselves no less radical than Stokely Carmichael, walked the streets of Harlem, defusing the situation and calming the excited crowds. Mayor John Lindsay spent three days and nights on the streets of Harlem and the

Brooklyn ghetto, endlessly persuading. New York avoided an explosion.

But Washington did blow up, on the day after the assassination. By 3 pm the smoke of fires hung like funeral banners over the black districts of the capital, the spring breeze pulling them towards the centre of the city, the White House and the Potomac. In the ghetto white-owned shops were looted and burned and blacks fought with the police and firemen.

Disorder also spread to the centre of the city. Panic raged there, too, as the inhabitants of the ghetto burst into the city centre and attacked shops. Thousands of government employees did not wait for the end of the working day, but fled their offices to escape the raging fury. The ship seemed to be listing and about to sink; amid the panic, the fires and the shooting, the flagship of the US empire was apparently about to go down. Thousands of cars crawled out of the city bumper to bumper, avoiding the black districts. White Washington sought refuge in the suburbs and in the neighbouring states of Maryland and Virginia. Despairing of taxis and failing to find room on the packed buses, civil servants and businessmen walked over the Memorial Bridge spanning the Potomac, hastening to reach the other side and get as far away as possible from the blacks.

This was a symbolic exodus of that America which Dr King had intended to shake by his poor people's march and which had now been thrown into turmoil by the furious mourning of the ghetto. His death had, indeed, shaken the capital, but he had dreamed of another shock—a creative shock.

If only King had seen all these eloquent and contradictory symbols of sorrow, hypocrisy and protest!

Detachments armed with machine-guns stood guard on the broad steps of the Capitol, ready to defend congress. But congress was deaf to the demand of jobs or wages for poor people.

The White House, the central house of white America, stood against the background of black clouds of smoke, the funeral tributes of black America. The flag over the White House stood at half-mast as a sign of mourning, but seventy-five soldiers drawn up in fighting order guarded its gates.

On April 5 Lyndon Johnson issued two presidential proclamations: one concerned a day of national mourning on Sunday, April 7, the other the immediate introduction of regular troops into the capital.

Two thousand soldiers cordoned off government buildings and mounted guard outside foreign embassies. Five hundred soldiers of the Third Infantry Regiment were moved from nearby Fort Maier. These impressively-built, imposing men were kept for honour guards and ceremonial meetings of foreign heads of state on the White House lawn. Now, dressed in campaign khaki, they were ready to meet the common people. Two thousand national guardsmen had also been placed on alert.

Walter Washington, mayor of Washington and, incidentally, black, placed the city under curfew from 5.30 pm to 6.30 am.

At midday the choir in Washington Cathedral sang that same spiritual "Precious Lord, Take My Hand" which Martin Luther King had not

been able to hear sung by Ben Branch. Four thousand people, including President Johnson, prayed for the repose of the soul of the "apostle of non-violence", who had known no peace on earth.

There were more whites than blacks in the cathedral, but the picture at police stations was, of course, quite the opposite: 2,000 blacks had been arrested by the end of the first day of disturbances.

Five blacks were killed. It may be noted that the police were proud of this figure, which they saw as proof of their moderation. They were permitted to shoot only in the most extreme circumstances, knowing from experience that wild firing only inflamed rioters further.

Reinforcements arrived in the capital on Saturday night—the parachute division which had pacified black rioters in Detroit in July 1967.

The blacks' mourning left in its wake conflagrations, new ruins and burnt-out steel girders standing black and lonely against a sky painted orange by the fires. It also left ransacked shops.

The general pattern was the same as in Watts, Newark and Detroit, but the motive was different—the murder of a man who had never tired of warning of the chaos which awaited America if it did not pay its historical debt to the oppressed blacks. Now the bill had been presented once again, in blind, unchecked and hopeless protest. Grief was mingled with criminality. Suits, hats, ties, cartons of beer and whisky and colour television sets were hauled out of shops. And although it was clear that order would triumph,

it was also clear that this would be the order of greater strength, not the order of brotherhood and justice which King had dreamed of.

"We have been very sick," the well-known journalist Murray Kempton wrote at that time. "A country is sick when the second thought in everyone's mind with the news that a Nobel Prize laureate has been murdered can be the fear that his death is the signal for violence and arson and that his first memorial must be children fleeing from a burning tenement."

The commentator Harriet Van Horne noted another aspect of the American tragedy: "If the Negro is now rising up in mighty wrath, he has three centuries of injustice as his spur. What continues to astonish is the patience and decency of most Negroes and the incredible charity of goodness of their fallen leader."

"Last night America became a place where you could understand the meaning of the word anarchy," the popular reporter Jimmy Breslin wrote in distress after a visit to the streets of black Washington.

This is an extract from his report:

"When the traffic light on the corner of 13th and V turned red the body on the sidewalk could be seen. It was a man in his 30s, lying on his back. One leg was drawn up under him. People walked through the smoke from the fires and went past the man without bothering to look at him.

"Two dogs that had been rooting at spilled garbage came up and were sniffing at the man. Two Army trucks, staying close to the curb, came rushing past. The dogs jumped back and went away.

"The man was in a brown suit and had on a shirt and tie. Blood ran from his nose and mouth. In the dark you couldn't tell whether there was dirt or blood from a chest wound on his shirt. 'He's dead,' somebody said.

" 'No, I think he's just about breathing,' somebody else said.

"A hospital was in the middle of the block. The man had probably been dumped on the corner with the idea that the hospital would come out and get him. The hospital has a circular driveway in front of it. It is five stories high. The sign says 'Children's Hospital, Founded in 1870'. Class entrance doors were locked. A guard opened them, but only grumpily.

" 'You've got a man dying up on the corner,' he was told.

"The guard turned and walked into the dimly-lit lobby. A short man in a business suit came out from an office behind the reception counter. 'I'm the administrator,' he said.

" 'There's a man dying on the corner,' he was told.

" 'What do you want us to do?' the administrator said.

" 'Help him.'

"The man shook his head. 'I'm not sending anybody from this place outside tonight for any reason,' he said."

On the street people were still walking past the body lying on the pavement, Breslin continues. Eventually a police car took it away.

That was how the first day of mourning passed in the capital.

The chronicle of mourning in dozens of other cities was a varied one, including church ser-

vices, fires, flags at half-mast, the crackle of shots, silent marches, the shriek of police and fire sirens, portraits in black frames, tear gas, the lamentations of black women and the frozen smiles on the faces of naked dummies thrown out of shop-windows.

The ghetto wept and exploded for five long days. Only on April 9, the day of the funeral, did quiet descend on America as the blessed sound of bells was heard and thousands of voices across the country sang "We shall overcome".

Chicago, Baltimore, Detroit, Cincinnati, Buffalo, Kansas City, Newark—explosions of protest occurred in more than one hundred cities. They were extinguished by police and 61,000 national guardsmen—never before had so many soldiers been sent into American cities at the same time. Thirty-nine people were killed and two thousand wounded. More than ten thousand were arrested.

April 1968 was eclipsed only by July 1967.

Perhaps just one of America's 200 million blacks and whites was calm at that time. He had breathed his last on this earth and now, flown to his native Atlanta, he lay in a brown coffin with bronze handles, surrounded by chrysanthemums, gladioli and lilies. He lay in a coffin with a glass lid, a stocky man in a pastor's black suit that stood out against the white lining of the coffin.

The "apostle of non-violence" knew nothing of the hurricane his death had aroused or of how many people would be accompanying him into the ground, an escort which, of course, he would have refused. This accompaniment of the dead,

the wounded and the arrested, of smoking ruins, devastated shops and national commotion showed that the cause for which he had lived was incomplete.

He lay in the chapel of a theological college; in the black Southern View cemetery a large white headstone was being inscribed with the epitaph: "Free At Last, Free At Last, Thank God Almighty I'm Free At Last".

A queue 1.5 kilometres long waited to pass by the coffin. It never became shorter, although it moved day and night. Blacks and whites stood in the queue. Many, many poor black people said farewell to their Moses, who had gone without leading them to the promised land. Black women lamented over him in the manner of simple people.

Yes, he had gone, yet he also remained. The face of the living King, the furious prophet, appeared on television screens and in the pages of newspapers and magazines. He was, indeed, now spoken of as a prophet. Martin Luther King, in becoming part of history, scorched the hearts of his fellow-countrymen with his words, grimly warning them that misfortune lay in wait for people who had learned to fly in the air like birds and swim in the seas like fish, but who had not learned to walk on the earth like brothers.

That misfortune was already on the streets, stamping his words with the mark of truth.

He was buried as not a single black had been buried during their 350 years of grief-filled history in America. King was accompanied by 150,000 people on his last journey, four miles through the streets of Atlanta from the Ebenezer

Church, where he had been the pastor, to Morehouse College, from which he had graduated twenty years previously. At the funeral service in the Ebenezer Church the eminent sat in the pews side by side with ordinary citizens, ranging from Vice-President Humphrey to King's parishioners. President Johnson was prevented from coming only by reasons of security. King's widow was present with his four children. Ralph Abernathy and King's close friends and associates were there. His brother and father were there, although Martin Luther King Senior fainted when he saw his dead son. Jacqueline Kennedy, widow of the assassinated president, was there and Robert Kennedy, too, was present, unaware that within two months he would meet his death in Los Angeles. All the other contenders for the presidency—Richard Nixon, Eugene McCarthy and Nelson Rockefeller—flew to Atlanta, after declaring an interval of mourning in their electoral campaigns.

Television made the entire nation a witness of the requiem at the Ebenezer Church. The concealed eyes of television cameras passed over the faces of the country's political elite.

The thousands for whom there was no room in the small church waited on the street—the obscure and the famous, mayors of large cities and Hollywood stars.

These people, in the church and outside it or sitting in their millions by television sets, heard once again the passionate eloquence of Martin Luther King, tinged with mysticism, yet earthy. They learned that this man, who walked side by side with death for so long, had spoken in his church two months previously of the speech he

would like to hear over his coffin. At the request of his brother, a tape recorder was switched on and King's words, tremulous as the pulsation of an exposed heart, were heard over King's coffin.

"Every now and then I guess we all think realistically about that day when we will be victimized with what is life's final common denominator—that something we call death.

"We all think about it and every now and then I think about my own death and I think about my own funeral. And I don't think about it in a morbid sense. And every now and then I ask myself what it is that I would want said and I have the word to you this morning.

"If any of you are around when I have to meet my day, I don't want a long funeral.

"And if you get somebody to deliver the eulogy tell him not to talk too long.

"And every now and then I wonder what I want him to say.

"Tell him not to mention that I have a Nobel Peace Prize—that isn't important.

"Tell him not to mention that I have 300 or 400 other awards—that's not important. Tell him not to mention where I went to school.

"I'd like somebody to mention that day that Martin Luther King Jr. tried to give his life serving others.

"I'd like for somebody to say that day that Martin Luther King Jr. tried to love somebody.

"I want you to say that day that I tried to be right and to walk with them. I want you to be able to say that day that I did try to feed the hungry. I want you to be able to say that

day that I did try in my life to clothe the naked. I want you to say on that day that I did try in my life to visit those who were in prison.

"And I want you to say that I tried to love and serve humanity.

"Yes, if you want to, say that I was a drum major. Say that I was a drum major for justice. Say that I was a drum major for peace. I was a drum major for righteousness.

"And all of the other shallow things will not matter.

"I won't have any money to leave behind. I won't have the fine and luxurious things of life to leave behind. But I just want to leave a committed life behind.

"And that is all I want to say . . ."

King's voice rose and fell and the words of this unique self-portrait struck at the ears and hearts of the variegated audience in the church and were carried across America, arousing feelings of solidarity in some, alienating others. His words had an unaccustomed ring for politicians, brought up on the cold rhetoric of the law and unaware of the passion, pain and love that live in the heart of a struggler. King had posthumously received the credentials of a prophet and his words breathed of something ancient, biblical, effaced by time, emasculated and dismissed as demagogy, but which was here again resurrected as real, genuine, proved by the facts of life and death.

It was an impressive funeral, but, without blasphemy, I would also say that it was a strange funeral. What made it strange? What gave it a touch of short-lived unreality?

It was strange because that America which had been deaf to King's struggle, that America which had turned away from the preacher developing into the leader of his people and created the climate for the Memphis shot, had now come to King's coffin, with respect but not without considerations of its own, with the attention of associating itself with him, canonising him in their own mould, rendering him posthumously safe and taking him away from the deprived in the name, of course, of the great, non-existent unity of the nation.

The struggle for King's legacy began at his grave-side and false claimants appeared beside his true heirs, reducing the great struggler and exposer of injustice to an inoffensive "apostle of non-violence".

These false pretenders could not be driven from King's grave, but they were met with silent resistance. The coffin was taken from the church to Morehouse College not in a gleaming hearse, but on a farm cart with high wooden sides, drawn by a pair of mules. Mules were the motive power of Southern share-croppers, who had received no benefit from the flood of motor vehicles in their country. Many of King's associates were dressed in farmer's overalls—the working clothes of marches and prisons. Among the black mourning suits the overalls were a reminder, a challenge and a vow.

The April sun cast sharp-edged shadows on the pavements. In the silence the wheels of the strange cart, brought from some dusty country road, rumbled on the asphalt. On the cart lay the coffin. Friends' hands led the lop-eared mules by the reins.

From time to time the unwinking eyes of television cameras, set up along the entire route of the funeral procession, inadvertently captured the faces of politicians wearing professional, wearily wise or victorious smiles. Then, by a sixth sense, they would feel that they were on the screen and wipe the smiles from their faces.

But this day did not belong to the politicians, who had willingly come to terms with King now that he was dead. Tens of thousands of people had come to Atlanta at the call of their consciences to honour King. He took part in this march as a man no longer alive, but he would, of course, have been glad to have seen the mass of open honest faces, black and white, striding forward.

"We shall overcome . . ." The song dominated the column, which seemed to have no end. It concluded the memorial meeting on the lawn of Morehouse College. So great a mass of strugglers for equality had not come together since the march on Washington and they followed custom by joining hands and swaying to the rhythm of the song, concluding sadly, proudly and resolutely:

We are not afraid,
We are not afraid,
We are not afraid today,
Oh, deep in my heart, I do believe
We shall overcome some day.

On April 8 President Johnson was to address both houses of congress. The speech, the nation was given to understand, would contain a large-

scale programme of aid to the blacks. But when calm returned to the ghettoes and congressmen protested against "haste", the president's speech was at first postponed and then cancelled altogether.

I visited Washington in the middle of April, a week after the funeral in Atlanta. The smoke of blazing buildings no longer wreathed the spring sky. The troops had gone and rioters were either awaiting trial or in hiding. On North-West 14th Street uneven pyramids of bricks lay along the pavements—the remains of collapsed walls. Passers-by hurried about their business as if nothing had happened, absorbed in their own affairs, not glancing at the burned-out buildings and the ruins.

Money flowed into King memorial funds, but for some people—who could say how many?—this was motivated not by feelings of grief and solidarity but was a matter of sad faces and businesslike calculations that donations to charity were tax-free. How long would the emotional shock last?

During those days the black commentator Carl Rowen (a former director of the US Information Agency, incidentally) stated that America's "haves" would have to loosen their purse-strings to help the "have-nots". When he learned of the response to his article, Rowen said that his prescription was "too bitter a pill" for many white Americans.

Only a few weeks had passed since the assassination, but the sad truth of Mayor John Lindsay's words that the national mourning for King was no more than a one-day spectacle for conscience's sake was already felt. Talk about the fu-

ture of the ghettoes was again couched in the familiar terms of whether or not to shoot at blacks when they attacked property. The same question was also asked in a more practical form—did it pay to shoot if this increased the number of such attacks?

Stirred to action, congress passed a law banning discrimination in the sale or rental of houses. This was officially declared to be a worthy monument to King, although black leaders were unanimous in branding it the latest half-measure. Legal locks had been removed from the doors of the ghetto, but where were the dollars needed to walk out? However, enormous sums continued to be lavished on the slaughter in Vietnam.

Ralph Abernathy, King's political successor, knew that the best memorial to the dead leader would be the poor people's march on Washington. Preparations for the march had been completed, but matters were not proceeding smoothly and congress, the White House and, of course, the Washington police were firmly opposed.

I visited Washington once again, in the second half of June 1968, just before my departure from the United States. At Arlington Cemetery grass had grown between the thin, rough slabs on the graves of John Kennedy and two of his children. To the left, on a hillslope a few dozen metres away, a modest white cross already stood amid the grass, marking the grave of Senator Robert Kennedy. A monument had not yet been erected. Tourists in bright summer clothes crowded round, clicking their cameras at the small cross. On the other side of the Potomac, by the Lincoln Memorial, where the grim marble woodcutter who

became the "emancipator" president sits frozen and immobile in his armchair, a "resurrection city" of tents and plywood shacks had been built by participants in the poor people's march. If one went outside the bounds of this "resurrection city" in the direction of the long, rectangular pond within its granite banks Lincoln looked down from the left, while far away to the right the dome of the Capitol could be seen soaring into the sky. But Lincoln was silent: he had long ceased to be an intercessor. And congress was angered by the disorderly conglomeration of cloth and plywood, which spoiled the best view in the capital.

As I approached I saw a man in farmer's overalls with a wide, black face by the pond, surrounded by a knot of reporters. It was Ralph Abernathy. There were not many reporters and they were listening to what Abernathy was saying because it was their job. The poor people's settlement had been smashed by the police more than once and when a sensation is repeated, interest in it wanes. Pickets of poor people at government buildings and delegations, courteously given a hearing by officials, had failed to produce results. The authorities were making ominous demands that the campaign be terminated because of insanitary conditions in the tent city which, heaven forbid, might infect the sterile cleanliness of bureaucratic Washington and because the campaign's official period of action had ended. Abernathy did everything he could, but behind his external resolve one could discern perplexity.

How would matters have proceeded had King been there? The chances of success were, in any

case, slim, but the absence of the leader was now sorely felt and his authority missed. The mass of participants expected had not appeared and the former dynamism and broad support from other sections of society was lacking.

I returned to New York and a day later saw newspaper photographs of Abernathy's face behind the bars of a police van. The poor people had been dispersed with clubs and "resurrection city" destroyed. Amid the rapid fire of headlines, two attracted my attention: "A commission of the House of Representatives is cool towards Johnson's call for tough control on gun sales" and "Abernathy given 20 days: disorder in the capital less".

So ended the poor people's march. They had not resurrected America . . .

In a bitter sense King had died at the right time. A temporary ebb in the black liberation movement had begun and the counter-blows of opponents were growing in strength. During the 1968 presidential campaign Nixon and Humphrey, catching the predominant mood of society, were more eager to gain the votes of white "men in the street", inclined towards the conservative upholding of "law and order", than those of blacks.

George Wallace established a third party and, to America's shame, received 10 million votes at the elections in November 1968. The national headquarters of this party were in Montgomery, where King had begun his path as leader of the bus boycott and where Wallace, his antithesis, had proclaimed "segregation now, segregation tomorrow, segregation for ever!" One in six electors had given his vote to the racist and quasi-

fascist, thereby firing a political bullet at the black population of America and its fallen leader . . .

* * *

Postscript. When I returned from New York to Moscow in the summer of 1968 I found that Dr King was little known to newspaper readers and had, therefore, not been taken into their hearts. People who wrote about the United States of America mentioned his name quite frequently but, again, only in passing. Conscious that I was at fault, I tried to redeem myself as best I could by writing an outline of the life and times of Martin Luther King Jr. and setting it against the background of the great cause for which he struggled and for which his comrades-in-arms continue to struggle, both those who agreed with him and those who had differed with him on many issues.

However, the desire to fill what was, to my mind, an inadmissable gap was not my only motive for undertaking this book. There was another stimulus. I had experienced the pain and bitterness of April 4, 1968, when America was stunned by the news of the murder in Memphis. And I remembered the feeling of loss that came to me on April 9 as I watched the funeral on television. That feeling arises when a great man with a great heart leaves the world—a heart so great and strong that its beating is conveyed to many thousands of other hearts.

As I delved into my subject I discovered much that I had not formerly known. The tragedy of Martin Luther King, a figure apparently so unusual in the America of the second half of the

20th century, grew into the tragedy of America. A country must be rich to give birth to such a son. A country must be cruel to kill him.

Like the light of a dead star, the words and thoughts of Dr King continued to reach the public in books and articles, words and thoughts expressed during his life but published only after his death.

They contained the same mature King people had known, direct and angry.

A man who found satisfaction in the thought that a feeling of dignity had awoken in black Americans and that "the sullen and silent slave" of the previous century had become "today's angry man", ready for struggle.

An optimist drawing faith from history who said: "The past is strewn with the ruins of the empires of tyranny, and each is a monument not merely to man's blunders, but to his capacity *to overcome* them. While it is a bitter fact that in America in 1968, I am denied equality simply because I am black, yet I am not a chattel slave. Millions of people have fought thousands of battles to enlarge my freedom; restricted as it still is, progress has been made. This is *why I remain an optimist, though I am also a realist* about the barriers before us."

A spokesman for the brotherhood of men, a spokesman for racial equality, who gave those white Americans who had fallen heroically in the struggle for the equality of their black fellow-citizens their due, but who did not forget that "the largest part of White America is still poisoned with racism, which is as native to our soil as pine trees, sagebrush and buffalo grass".

A stern judge who warned his country that it had not yet changed because many thought that it did not need changes—but that this was an illusion of the damned. America had to change, he said, because its 28 million black citizens would "no longer live supinely in a wretched past. They have left the valley of despair; they have found strength in struggle, and whether they live or die, they shall never crave nor retreat again. Joined by white allies, they will shake the prison walls until they fall. America must change . . ."

REQUEST TO READERS

Progress Publishers would be glad to have your opinion of this book, its translation and design and any suggestions you may have for future publications.

Please send all your comments to 17, Zubovsky Boulevard, Moscow, USSR.

Printed in the
Union of Soviet Socialist Republics